THE HOUSE OF HELEN

CORRA HARRIS

Class PZ3
Book H2406
Copyright No. Ho
copy 2

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

THE HOUSE OF HELEN

CORRA HARRIS

THE HOUSE OF HELEN

BY

CORRA HARRIS

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF ADAM," "THE EYES OF LOVE," "MY SON," "HAPPILY MARRIED," "A CIRCUIT RIDER'S WIFE," "THE RECORDING ANGEL," ETC.

AND IN COLLABORATION WITH FAITH HARRIS LEECH: "FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN"

NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

copy B

PZ3
.H2406
Ho
copy 2

COPYRIGHT, 1923,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1922, 1923,
BY THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

THE HOUSE OF HELEN. II

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SEP 17 '23
©CLA752932

PART ONE

THE HOUSE OF HELEN

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

The town of Shannon lay like a wreath flung wide upon the hills above one of those long, green, fertile valleys to be seen everywhere below the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Georgia. It was nothing like a city, merely a neat, little town built by thrifty people since the Civil War. Therefore, there were no colonial residences in it to remind you of the strutting, magnificent past, but the houses in it were smaller, painted any color that pleased the fancy, ruffled from end to end, with spindle-legged porches and scalloped gables. White church spires stuck up out of it like the forefingers of faith in God. There was a town square, around which business was done comfortably and leisurely on a credit basis.

The red-brick courthouse stood in this square, with a long, wide flight of white cement steps to it, showing like the teeth of the law; not that any one minded these teeth. The dome of this courthouse was covered with galvanized tin. It shone above the tufted trees on bright days like an immense silver helmet. And beneath this helmet there was the town clock, a good, old man with a plain, round face with only the wrinkles that marked the hours on it. Half the men in Shannon who carried watch chains carried no watches because this clock was so infallibly faithful to the sun.

At the time of which I write no one in Shannon called the narrow or even the wide spaces, which separated their respective homes from the street, a lawn. It was the "front yard," and usually divided with a picket fence from the back yard, where the hens attended to business. Flowers, of the kind in service to "ladies" who wear aprons and do their own work and have an artless affection for blooming things, inhabited these front yards, regardless of law and order in the matter of background or perspective. The forsythia, syringas, roses and altheas had been planted with reference to their health in relation to the sun, and, whatever happened, they

bloomed. Only the smaller plants, like annuals, were sternly disciplined. They stood up in beds or along the graveled walks, like spelling classes in a properly graded school, every one of them reciting a bloom after the manner of its kind.

These ladies of Shannon also kept "potted plants" and exchanged cuttings. It is only after you have ceased to be thrifty and have become rich that you imprison your flowers in a conservatory or a greenhouse. Shannon reached this scandalous pinnacle of prosperity years later, but at this time there was what may be called miniature "bleachers" on the front porches in Shannon where red and pink and white geraniums doubled up gorgeous fists of bloom, and fuchsias hung their waxened bells in the breeze, and begonias flaunted their rich, dark leaves, and that unspeakably gross and hardy vine, the Wandering Jew, wandered at will.

These flower-laden bleachers were especially characteristic of Wiggs Street, because this was the principal residence street of Shannon. And it was all a family affair. The nieces of the geraniums on Mrs. Adams' porch bloomed on the porch of the Cutter home across the way. And Mrs. Adams had obtained the root of her sword fern from Mrs. Cutter, and so on and so forth.

You might multiply it by the seeds or shoots or roots of ten thousand flowers.

This was why Shannon showed like a wreath on the hills above the valley. The women there were diligent. They loved their homes. So their front yards looked like flowered calico aprons, tied onto these homes as their own aprons were tied about their plump waists. The women were very good; the men were reasonably respectable. There was ambition without culture. But give them time. Already Mr. George William Cutter had sent his son, young George William, to college for two years. That ought to amount to something, culturally speaking. And Mrs. Mary Anne Adams was considering whether she could afford to send her daughter Helen to a boarding school for a year, or whether she would leave Helen to take her chances at George with only a high-school education and her music and a little drawing for accomplishments! But if she did decide to send Helen "off to school," it ought to amount to a great deal more, culturally speaking. Girls acquire the gloss of elegance and refinement more rapidly than boys do, and it is apt to stay on them longer, no matter what stays in them.

The first definite upward trend in a tacky little

town begins when some insolently prosperous citizen sends his suburban-bred son to college just long enough for him to claim that he is a "college man," and when some valorous mother, usually a widow, follows suit and sends her daughter to a "seminary," because she is not to be outdone by the above-mentioned prosperous citizen, even if she is not prosperous. When these two young beings return with their intellectual noses in the air, you may look out. The scenes in that town must change.

Business gets a hunch, or somebody's business goes into bankruptcy. The domestic sphere spins around, loses its ancient balance and the girl gives a really fashionable tea party, after removing the precious potted plants from the front porch and placing her tables there, if it is a pleasant day. These things happen and you cannot help it. Give them an inch of education abroad and they will take an ell of license with your manners, convictions, and prejudices when they come home.

Nothing like this had yet happened in Shannon. Only drummers and salesmen really knew and saw what was going on in the world, and no drummers or salesmen lived there. The town was passing tranquilly through its religious and

golden-oak periods. Most people went to church, and everybody who was anybody had golden-oak furniture, including an upright piano, as distinguished from the antiquated square piano. If the latter was for the present beyond their means, they had an elaborately carved and bracketed organ of the same durable wood, through which the Sabbath-afternoon air passed in hymnal strains at about the same hour it bore the aroma of boiling coffee on week days.

This is a mere flash of what Shannon was in those days; such an impression as you might have received from the window of your car if you had been passing through on one of those fast trains that did not stop at Shannon, but roared by as if this little town did not exist. And if you knew all that was to happen there within the next twenty years to only two people, not to mention the remaining six thousand of her inhabitants, to whom a great deal more must have happened, you would agree that I am justified in detaining you a moment before beginning this tale.

Otherwise, how could you understand that Helen belonged by tradition, by environment, by the very petunias that bordered her mother's flower beds, to the Agnes tribe of meek and enduring women. I am not claiming that this is a

wiser, abler tribe than the numerous modern tribes of insurgent women, many of whom have faced the same emergencies. I leave each one of you to decide that question according to your lights, leaving out the traditions and the petunias, because doubtless you have long since made way with them.

My task is simply to set down here exactly what happened, with no more regard for the moral than the facts themselves carry. And so I give you my word that this is a true story, and that the events I have recorded did happen and that the "House of Helen" does stand to this day in Shannon. You may see it from the window of your car, as you pass through, halfway down Wiggs Street, on the right-hand side, and facing you. It is not so large, so pretentious as the other residences which have taken the place of the cottages that stood along this street during the golden-oak period, but it looks different, that house, serene, as a house should that has weathered the storm and has fair weather forever within.

CHAPTER II

It was a day in June, in the year 1902. They are much the same everywhere, only in Georgia there is more June in such a day. Farther south the withering heat hints of July; farther north there may be an edge of cold to the air; but in Georgia it is always perfectly June in June, all softness, fragrance, filled with the fearless growth and bloom of every living thing—the sort of day that seems to hum to itself with the wings of a thousand bees; adolescent weather, fragrant, soft, filled with the growth and yearning of every living thing from the frailest flower that blooms to the oldest tree and the oldest man.

On such a day this story begins, somewhere between half past three and four o'clock in the afternoon. The exact moment makes no difference because nothing that you could see with the naked eye happened when the first scene was laid. (It is only the comedies and crimes of living that catch the eye. The great dramas and the great tragedies begin within, and they end there.) The town was somnambulent—very little traffic; none at all on Wiggs Street. You could only

have known by the gentle bending of the frailer-stemmed flowers before the cottages on either side that even a breeze was passing by. But over all this stillness and piercing this droning silence came the notes of a piano, sad, sweet and frequently too far apart, as if this piano waited patiently while the performer found the next note, and then found it again on the keyboard. These desiccated fragments of Narcissus, a popular instrumental piece at that time, issued from the parlor windows of the Adams cottage. Some one, who had no ear for music, but only a conscience, was practicing inside.

Presently this conscience was satisfied, for the lid of the piano went down with a thud. There was a quick step, the whisk of white skirts in the darkened hall, the opening and closing of a door, followed by what we must infer was a sort of primping silence.

Then a voice, firm and maternal, came through the front bedroom window on that side of the house: "Helen, why are you wearing your organdie?"

"I don't know, mother," a young voice answered.

I doubt if she did know. Some of the shrewdest acts of a maiden are unintelligible to her.

"Well, it is silly, putting on your nice things to go to choir practice."

It was silly, but one frequently makes the silliest preparations for happiness. This is the wisdom of youth. Age cannot beat it.

After a pause, the same elder voice, made smoother—"Have you seen George?"

"Not in two years. Why?"

"He has been at home a week, hasn't he?"

"I don't know when he came."

The tone implied that the comings and goings of this George were matters of supreme indifference to her.

"Mrs. Cutter told me his father means for him to work this summer."

No response.

"He had three months in the University School of Finance last summer, she told me. This summer his father plans to put him through, she said."

Still no response.

"Don't forget to call for my pass book at the bank, Helen," this was said in a slightly higher key, indicating that the girl had left the room. "You had better go by the bank on your way to the church. It closes at four o'clock."

"Yes, mother;" and at the same moment this

young girl came out of the house, down the steps, walking hurriedly.

When she reached the street she began to move more sedately, giving herself an air. Her ankles were slim; her black satin pumps had low French heels. She wore a white organdie. The fineness, tucks and lace of her petticoat showed through the full skirt. The bodice was plain, finished at the neck with an edge of lace, and gathered puffily in at the belt. The fineness, tucks and lace of an underbody clung daintily to her shoulders and showed through. The sleeves were short. Her arms round and very fair. A wide taffeta ribbon sash of pale blue, crushed crinklingly about her waist, was tied in a butterfly bow behind, very stiff and upstanding.

She wore a broad-brimmed, white leghorn hat, trimmed with tiny bunches of field flowers. This hat was tilted slightly to one side, as if she lacked the courage to pull it down, lest she should reveal more than she dared tell of what she was and meant. It rested, therefore, at the merest, most innocent angle of coquetry.

The girl herself was utterly and entrancingly fair. She had straight hair, of the shade called ash blond; no deeper golden lights in it; most of it hidden beneath the encompassing hat. If

you found it, you must do so by an act of the imagination. And the absurd primness with which it lay so close and smoothly above her ears teased the imagination. Her skin was white, with that underglow of pink so faint it could scarcely be called color—cheeks round, not too full. The oval chin had the softness of youth. She had a mouth made for silence; it was serious. The under lip was a straight pink line, prettily turned, which did not go very far; the upper lip was distinctly full in the center, with a sort of flute there which ended in a dainty, pointed, white scallop beneath the nose, and it closed purposefully over the lower lip. This was due to the fact that if she was not mindful, it let go, curled up and showed the only flaw she had—two lovely teeth, a trifle prominent because they lapped at the lower edge after the manner of some Anglo-Saxon ancestor from whom she must have inherited them. Her nose might amount to something later in life as an indication of character, but now it was merely a good little nose, rounded at the end where it should have been pointed, and too brief for beauty.

The eyes were this girl's distinguishing feature. They remained so long after all her loveliness and fairness had changed and failed. They

were large, blue, white-lidded, heavily fringed with lashes darker than her hair. And they looked at you, at him, at all the world and the weather, calmly, from beneath long, sweeping brows, as if these brows were the slender wings of the thoughts she had when she looked at you.

This is what a girl is, and nothing more—loveliness, innocence, and the wordless sweet desire of herself. You cannot predict her. Anything may change her; one thing only is certain—she is sure to change. The woman will be profoundly different. This is why writers of mere fiction have discarded the young girl heroine. Nothing can make her interesting but a tragedy, until she develops her human perversities and attributes, which may require more years than the tale can afford.

Helen walked sedately through Wiggs Street, as if every window of every house was an eye that observed her. But when she came to the end, where this street entered the public square, her gait changed, much as your voice changes inflection according to the tune you sing. This was a livelier tune now to which she walked. She stepped along briskly, prettily. Her skirts whisked, her body swayed a little as if this might turn out to be a waltz. Every shop window she passed was

a mirror, in which she caught an encouraging glimpse of herself. Once she halted long enough to draw the brim of her hat forward and sidewise. Then she went on, the published truth of herself at last. And her own mother would not have known her.

Few mothers, even in that prunes-and-prism period, relatively speaking, would have recognized their daughters abroad. But every man would. It is Nature having her way, you understand, and no harm done; because in the end these maidens must—and they will—take Nature, which after all is the very nearest relative of maidenhood, into their confidence and be guided by her.

The First National Bank of Shannon was no great institution. Still it was modestly conspicuous. What I mean is that you could tell at a glance and from a distance that this was a bank, not a doctor's office, by the tall cement columns in front, the only example of four-legged magnificence in the shakily diversified architecture surrounding this square.

But Mr. George William Cutter would never have thought of exalting himself in a private office with a ground glass door, showing the title "President," published on this door. He sat at a rolled-top desk in a space reserved for him to

the left of the door, by a stout oaken banister which divided it from the lobby. The only distinction he permitted himself was to sit with his back to the window which looked on the square. What was more to the point he faced the long cage of the bank proper, and was always in a position to see, know or at least shrewdly infer what was going on inside and outside in the lobby.

But if you were a customer, seeking a loan or even planning to open an account, you must come in and face about before you could face the president. There was dignity, financial assurance, but no offensive pride, in his sitting posture to the public. He was a man with a recognized girth, not entirely bald. His hair was gray; so was his short, clipped mustache. He wore light gray clothes in summer and dark gray clothes in the winter. And he had a fine strong commercial countenance. He might almost have cashed it, his face was so well certified by a pair of shrewd gray eyes, as distinguished from the cunning of similar eyes.

On this June afternoon he sat reared back, his coat thrust clear of the wide expanse of his white shirt front, like the wings of an old gray rooster cocked up on a hot day. He was smoking a black cigar. From time to time he shot a glance into

the cage of the bank; and each time the corners of his mouth went up, the fired end of the cigar also went up, his eyes narrowed to a mere gray slit of light as sharp as a lance, and his whole face crinkled into an expression of humor and satisfaction. Sometimes an experienced turfman so regards a young and mettlesome colt that is being broken to the gait, when the colt acts up to his breeding, takes the bit and goes, even if he does waste wind and sweat in the performance.

Directly in line with his vision a tall, broad-shouldered young man was standing before an adding machine in his shirt sleeves. This was George William Cutter, Junior, inducted into the rear end of the banking business a week since. He was working furiously with the halting earnestness of a man not accustomed to grind up figures in a machine and pedal them out on a long strip of paper with his foot. His hair was red and stood up like a torch on his head. His mouth was warped, his nose snarled, his face was flushed and there was an angry squint in his red brown eyes as he struck the keys, jerked the lever and slammed the pedal once in so often—forty little movements that kept the muscles of his big body in a sort of frivolous activity.

Mr. Cutter, Senior, was thinking: "He's got it

in him, the go. He will make good if he can be made to stick. Ought to marry, ought'er marry right now. That would stamp him down to it."

What young George was thinking as he paused to mop his steaming brow was: "Gad! If three days in here takes it out of a fellow like this, what will thirty years do to him?"

He knew that he was being groomed to succeed his father. It might be a bright future for a young man, but as a human being it held no brighter prospect than escaping from this cage and sitting where his father sat now, fat and sedentary in all his habits. He was restless. He was red-headed. He was an athlete on the university team. There had been some question about whether he should take his final year. He would let the "old man" know that he was willing and anxious to go back to the university in the fall. He was not ready to be imprisoned for life with dollars, not yet!

At this moment the street door, that had admitted everybody all day from the leading merchants, workers, widows, all the way down to the fat woman who kept the fruit stand, opened again. A young girl came in. It was as if spring and snow and sweetness had entered. There was

so much whiteness and coolness in the presence she made. A mere hint of far-off blue skies, and as if Nature had granted her the flowers she wore on this hat. She passed the teller's window, also the cashier's window. She looked neither to the right nor the left. The white scallop in the pink upper lip was pressed primly, holding it, like a word she would not say, upon the round pink under lip. She came directly to the bookkeeper's window, faced it, stared at him and waited.

When she entered he had made three steps backward, which brought him to the wall behind him. He was conscious of being without his coat. But if you are a man in a bank you are not supposed to scamper out of sight like a lady in negligee, if some one comes to call. You stood your ground with dignity, no matter how you looked. He stood his; he did not move a muscle. He may have breathed, but if so it was no more than a secret breath merely to sustain life. Their eyes met; his filled with the fire of an amazement, hers calm and speechless. She regarded him as one regards a picture on the wall.

This was all that happened, lasting no longer than the instant of time required for the bookkeeper to look up, see her and slide himself with one step like a little, thin-necked, bald-headed,

stooped-shouldered fact before the window, blotting out the vision of her.

Young Cutter heard her murmur something, saw the bookkeeper draw a pass book from a stack of these dingy records and slide it beneath the wicket of the window.

He heard her say "thank you" in a faint, soft, bell-like voice. Then she turned and went out.

He stared about him. How was this? He expected a wave of excitement to mark her passing, as people exclaim at the sight of something ineffable. Had no one seen her but himself? Apparently not. Every man in there was working with his usual air of absorption. For another instant he stood free, exalted, his eyes filled with the explosive brightness of a great emotion. Then it faded into self-consciousness, a downward look as he sneaked back to his machine, hoping that he had not been observed.

This is the only kind of modesty of which men are capable. If one of them went out with this look of neighing valor on his face he would be arrested, of course, because it is such a perfectly scandalous expression. But if a maid walks abroad with love published in her eyes and on her very lips, you are moved to reverence, because it is a sort of piety which seems to sanctify her.

He bent lower over his task, shot the lever down with a bang, struck the pedal harshly and rhythmically—made a noise, implying that he was and had been, without interruption, wholly engrossed with this business.

"Remember her, George?" came his father's voice like a shot out of a clear sky.

"Who?" asked George, instantly on his guard.

"The girl that came in just now."

"I didn't notice. Who was she?"

"Helen Adams."

"Never should have recognized her." This was the truth. He had recognized only loveliness, not the maiden name of it.

"Last time you saw her she was a long-legged, saucer-faced youngster, wearing her hair plaited and tied with a blue ribbon, I reckon."

"That's the way I remember little Helen," George admitted, grinning.

"Two years make a lot of difference in a girl of that age. Pretty, ain't she?"

The young man did not answer. He was suddenly and unaccountably annoyed. When your whole mind is concentrated on a girl, she becomes your religion and you do not care to enter into a doctrinal discussion of this religion with another man, not even your old, gray-haired father,

because she has become the sacred silence of your own soul, no matter what or who she was yesterday, nor even if you never had so much as a twinge of soul until this moment. You practically invent your soul then and there out of the joy and daylight of your youth, because it is the only place suitable for such a creature to occupy. Let Moses and the prophets stand aside! This is your pagan period of vestal virgins; not that you know it, but it is.

Mr. Cutter stood up, produced a heavy gold watch, studied the face of it, grinned, jerked his coat down and around, buttoned one button of it by the hardest work and reached for his hat. "Well, George, I guess you'll finish before you quit," he said.

This was a hint. The son took it. "All right, sir. I'll be along about midnight," he answered good-naturedly, at the same time making a wry face.

"Oh, you'll probably get in before suppertime. The work will come easier in a day or two," the father retorted as he stalked out.

He was scarcely out of sight before the cashier, teller and bookkeeper followed in quick procession.

George was now alone. He changed his scene

instantly, as most people do when they are left alone. He straightened up, started smoking, moved directly into the current of the electric fan, folded his arms and thought profoundly, his head lifted, eyes fixed in a noble gaze, as if on no particular object; a heroic figure, blowing volumes of smoke through his nose.

What a young man thinks in this mood may be imagined, but it never can be known. And the writer does not live with the wisdom or grace to translate his deep, singing dumbness into words.

Presently he went back to his task, working now with swiftness and concentration, as if his whole future depended upon finishing what he was doing in the shortest possible time. He finished in thirty minutes, disappeared into the rear of the bank and reappeared five minutes later through the side door. He was brushed, groomed and freshened to the last degree of elegance. His homespun fitted him with an air. He stepped with a long, prideful stride—and got no farther than the corner of the next street. Here he halted, looking all possible ways at once—nobody in sight; plenty of people, you understand, but not the girl. He had seen her pass this corner.

He waited. Wherever she had gone, she should

be returning by this time. This one and that one hailed him as they went by. A fellow he knew stopped and engaged him in conversation. He was annoyed. Suppose the girl appeared, how was he to escape from this ass? The ass finally took in the situation and moved on, looking back as he turned the next corner.

George looked at his watch—after five! She certainly should be going home by this time. Everybody in sight was on his way home. Suppose he had missed her; suppose she had gone around the other way! Jumping cats, what a fool he had been, wasting time here! He started off, walking rapidly but still with that magnificent, stiff-legged strut.

Some one came alongside, caught his arm and whirled him half around. "Where you going in such a hurry, Cutter?"

This was Charley Harman, a friend, but this was no time for friends to be butting in.

"Home," said George briefly, by way of implying that he was not inviting company home with him.

"So am I, but I never walk fast when I'm going home. Let's get a drink in here"; halting as they came opposite a drug store.

"Take one for me," Cutter said with a short laugh and moved on so hurriedly that Harman took the hint.

Nothing else happened until he reached the place where Wiggs Street opened on the square. He stared down the flower-blooming vista of this street. He could see men watering their front yards and the women watering their flowers. He could hear the boom of his father's voice half a block down, talking to some one in the next yard. He saw Mrs. Adams sitting, large and amorphous, in a rocking-chair on her front porch. He supposed that she also was waiting for Helen.

Then he saw her approaching from the other end of the street, not distant, but divided from him by the eyes of all these people sitting and puttering around in their front yards. He thought she walked as if she were sad or good or something. And he had this consolation, as she finally turned in and went up the steps of the Adams' cottage, he was sure that she had seen him. He was sure that their eyes had met. He also observed when he came down into the street to his own home that she had not stopped on the porch with her mother, but had gone directly inside.

CHAPTER III

When you are in love, everything is important and everything is secret. You become a consummate actor and liar in vain, because the whole world knows your secret almost as soon as you do.

That evening at the dinner table, George was so gay, so full of himself, so ready to laugh and make a joke that Mrs. Cutter was beside herself with pride and happiness.

"He is such a good boy, so unconscious of his good looks and his intellect," she told Mr. Cutter when they were alone together after dinner.

"Intellect!" said Mr. Cutter in that tone of voice.

"Yes; you know how smart he is; but he is not the least conceited, just light-hearted and happy as he should be at his age. I say it shows he is a good boy."

"Where is he now?" Mr. Cutter wanted to know.

The question appeared to Mrs. Cutter to be irrelevant. She said she did not know; why?

"Nothing," answered her husband.

She said he was around somewhere, probably in his room. She went to the bottom of the stairs. "Georgie!" she called.

No answer. Well, then he must be out front somewhere, and went to prove that he was. But she could not find him. Then she came back and wanted to know of Mr. Cutter what difference did it make, if they did not know where he was? George was no longer a child. Couldn't he trust his own son?

Oh, yes; in reason he could and did trust him. "But I'll tell you one thing, Maggie," he added, laying aside his paper and looking her squarely in the face, "George should get married."

"Married; just as he is ready to enjoy his youth and not even out of the university yet—and only twenty-one. What do you mean?" she demanded indignantly.

"That a blaze-faced horse and a red-headed man are both vain things for safety," he retorted.

"Do you know anything wrong about George?" she demanded, after a gasping pause.

"No."

"A single thing?"

"Not a single thing. I was merely stating a natural fact."

She had risen, a little, slim, fiery-eyed woman.

She drew herself up. He watched her ascend. He refused to quail beneath the spark in her eye.

"Mr. Cutter," she began ominously, because she gave him this title only when she was ominous, "when you married me I had red hair. My hair is still red."

"Yes, my dear; but you were a girl. I said a man. I meant a young man with red hair. There is all the latitudes and longitudes in life between the one and the other. If you were a red-haired young man, I should think twice before I'd give a daughter of mine in marriage to you. But you will recall that I had black hair," he concluded, laughing.

A father who would traduce his own son for inheriting hair the color of his mother's and without cause—well, she could not understand such a father. Whereupon she left the room in high dudgeon, but really to go and look for this son. Her confidence in him had not been shaken, but she was anxious without reason, which is the keenest anxiety from which women suffer.

She found him pacing back and forth in the vegetable garden, arms folded, face lifted like a yowling puppy's to the moon; not that this simile occurred to her. He appeared to her a potentially

great man, breathing his thoughts in this quiet place.

He was annoyed at this interruption. Was he never to have a moment alone to think this thing out! He really thought he was thinking, you understand, when he was only visualizing a girl in a white dress, with a blue sash, blue eyes and blue cornflowers on her hat; blue was the most entrancing color in the world, and so on and so forth. He was trying to imagine what she would say if she said anything, when he saw his mother approaching. He repressed his impatience. They walked together between the bald-headed cabbage and the young, curled-up, green lettuce. She thought she was sharing his thoughts. Something had been said about his experiences in the bank. Many a mother and some fathers would leap with amazement, if they really knew the thoughts they do not share with their sons and daughters at such times.

Still this was an innocent young man, as men go, a good son, as sons are reckoned. He was well within his rights to be pursuing his love fancies. And for a long period of this time he remained in a state of legal innocence of which any man or husband might boast. Mrs. Cutter was entirely justified in despising the opinion Mr.

Cutter had given that night of this excellent young man. Sometimes more than twenty years are required to fulfill a paternal prophecy.

Mrs. Adams remained seated on the porch. She supposed Helen had gone to her room to take off her hat and would return presently. It was much cooler out here, and the street was interesting at this hour of the late afternoon, like watching a very good human play, where all the characters are decent.

She saw Mrs. Shaw bustling in and out, herding her numerous family. This meant that they were having early supper, probably cold supper, and that they would go to the band concert afterwards. The Shaws spent a good deal on amusements. She hoped they could afford it.

There was Mr. Flitch sitting alone on his front porch, with his heels cocked up on the banister. This meant that he was in a state of rebellion, because he never stuck his feet on to this immaculately white banister if he was in a proper frame of mind. It also meant that Mrs. Flitch had her feelings hurt again and was probably in her room suffering from this ailment. She had heard that the Flitches did not get on well together. In her opinion this was Ella Flitch's fault. You could not live diagonally across the street from a wasp-

ish woman and belong to the same missionary society without knowing that she was waspish.

I am writing this into the record—it was no part of Mrs. Adams' reflections—that if you are a woman you always blame the wife for her marital unhappiness; if you are a man you know, of course, that the husband is at fault, even if you listen cordially to your own wife when she is taking the contrary view.

Mrs. Adams turned her neat, little, gray head slowly, surreptitiously and took a swift glance up the street at the Cutter residence. Then she turned it back again. But she had read all the news up there to be seen with the naked eye, assisted by powerful spectacles. Mr. and Mrs. Cutter were seated comfortably in their respective porch chairs. And George was out in the swing, elegantly folded into a sitting posture where he commanded a view of her front porch. If you are the mother of a daughter, you notice such little circumstances whether they mean anything or not, because they may be very significant.

The sight of this young man sentinel reminded her of something. Where was Helen? What was she doing so long inside? She arose at once and went in to see about this.

"Helen!" she called from the hall.

No answer.

She walked heavily to the closed bedroom door and knocked authoritatively.

No answer. Not a sound.

"Helen, are you in there?"

"Yes, mother," came the faint reply.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing," in a wailing, muffled voice, as if this person who was doing "nothing" was being smothered.

Mrs. Cutter thrust the door open and went in. She was astounded. Her daughter lay face downward across the bed, with her arms wound above her head in two beautifully curved lines of mute despair. Two pretty legs extended stiffly beyond the uttermost that skirts could do to cover them. One slippered foot worked slowly as you move a foot in pain, and at quick intervals the slender form rose and fell convulsively to the passionate rhythm of sobs.

"What on earth is the matter?" the mother exclaimed.

"Nothing."

"Are you ill?"

"No."

"Has anything happened?"

"Not a thing."

"Why are you crying?"

"I don't know. Oh, mother, I just want to be left alone"—followed by another paroxysm of weeping.

Mrs. Adams waited grimly until the distressing convulsions of the slender young body subsided. Then she began again: "Well, you can't be left in this fix. Turn over, Helen. You are mussing your dress."

The girl turned obediently, her face poignantly, sweetly pink, very sad. Her eyes bright with tears like violets after a summer rain. The flush was ominous. Mrs. Adams had never seen Helen this color before, never in her life. She bent and laid a palm on the girl's brow—warm, but moist; certainly not feverish.

She stood regarding her daughter thoughtfully. Then she sat down on the side of the bed, took one of Helen's hands in her own harsher, stronger hand, where it lay like a plucked lily, wilted, icy cold. She stroked it gently. Her face softened, her eyes brooded, as if through a mist she beheld a memory of herself long ago, which suddenly freshened and brightened into the figure of the girl she had been.

Mothers are omniscient. They have little paths back and forth through their years by which

the ghosts of them can always find you, wherever you are. Not another word was spoken for a long time between these two; the younger, overcome by the future, holding the unsolved, longed-for mystery of love; the other, overcome by the past, which held for her the dreadful reality of love. Neither had or could escape. They accomplished a wordless sympathy on this basis.

Mrs. Adams' reflections were strangely mixed, what with that sundown feeling she had of her own youth and the anxieties of a mother growing stronger every moment. She would like to know, for example, if Helen had seen George Cutter. Had she gone by the bank for the pass book? But even when she caught sight of this book lying on the dresser, with the ends of many checks sticking out of it, she did not put the question. Love is a wound too painful to be dressed with the tenderest words when it is first made, much less scraped with a question.

She was, over and above her emotions as a woman and a mother, fairly well satisfied with the situation. She inferred that George and Helen had had some sort of passage at arms. And she did not suppose that any man in or out of his senses could actually resist for long a girl of Helen's soft charm. Mothers have their

pride, you understand. This one was shrewd, eminently practical. You must be, to deal with youth at this stage.

The room was flooded with the golden effulgence of a summer twilight when at last she arose, moved gently toward the door, picking up the bank book as she passed the dresser and thrusting it into her pocket. "Helen," she said from the doorway, "it is the heat. This has been a very warm day. You will be better presently."

"Yes, mother, I think it was the heat; and I do feel better," the girl answered faintly.

"There is ice tea and chicken salad for supper," Mrs. Adams suggested.

"I don't think I care for anything."

"Well, later then. I'll leave the tea and your salad on the ice," the mother said, going out and closing the door.

CHAPTER IV

This was the beginning of that affair. Helen remembered the day well. A woman never forgets the sky and the weather of the day upon which love called her forth to the vicissitudes of love. But as things turned out, I doubt if she would mention that day now, as other women do when the bloom of their years has past. But at the best a courtship is strangely ephemeral, if you consider the consequences. It is like fugitive verses published to-day, gone to-morrow, like the fragrance of flowers blown upon a wind that passes and never returns. So much of it cannot be made into words; a glance of the eye, quick as light, revealing all; but who can translate the look or the long silences between lovers? Nature knows her business. The whole world, the heavens and the earth and the fullness thereof is an incantation made to ensnare lovers to her purpose. And not a word grows anywhere to betray this charm. You may be strong or weak, wise or simple, cynical, disillusioned, protected with all the knowledge of men, but there is no escape. Nature gets you at last; on honor or dishonor you

must pay your debt to her in love. When you are done, nothing remains but your dust, a handful of something with which to fertilize love again —a little retail economy Nature makes in her procreating plans.

The next day after this first day was a Sabbath. I do not believe in predestination, doctrinally speaking. The meaning of that term, I should say, was strictly human, and is derived from our short-winded conception of time, which does not exist either, except in the mortal sense. But by some prearranged prudence of Providence, by which all things come to pass whether we will or no, including the most intimate and personal things, the Cutters attended the same church that the remaining mother and daughter of the Adams family attended. It was a very good little church, glistening white within, shining white without, like an enameled bathtub with a roof and a steeple. I will not be sure, but my impression is that the denomination was Baptist. In any case, Helen Adams belonged to the choir.

On this Sunday morning she sang a solo, Jerusalem the Golden. She had a fresh young voice, roomy and soft at the bottom, triumphantly high and keen at the top. She wore white as usual and little fluttering skylines of blue tied in a bow

as usual. When she stood up to sing she lifted her eyes as if these eyes and this face were the words of a young morning prayer; she let go her beautifully crimped upper lip, opened her mouth as if this mouth were a rose bursting into bloom —and sang. I do not know if she sang well, having no skill in these matters; but it is certain that she looked like an angel. What I mean is that if you had no visual acquaintance with angels, you would have known at once that this was the very image of the way an angel should look.

The congregation listened with the peaceful apathy peculiar to every small town congregation, when it is being mulled in the music of a hymn or the Word. This made the one exception the more noticeable.

George William Cutter, Junior, looked and listened with a fervor which far surpassed anything that mere piety could do for a young man's praying countenance. Fortunately he was seated far back in the publican and sinner section of the church. Thus he escaped the sophisticated attention of the elder saints toward the front. Never had he seen anything so lovely as this girl, the high look she had with the notes of this hymn, trembling as they came from her round, white throat or flaring into a perfect ecstasy of joy.

When she had finally caroled out and sat down, he whispered under his breath, "Lord! Lord!" although he was not a religious man and meant nothing of the sort by this exclamation.

The moment the benediction was pronounced, he stepped briskly from his place in that sparsely settled part of the church, met the slow-moving tattling tide of the congregation coming out as he hurried down the aisle like a good swimmer in sluggish waters until he reached Helen standing in the rear ranks with her mother.

He bowed to Mrs. Adams. He hoped she remembered him—George Cutter, extending his hand.

Oh, yes; she remembered him, she said mildly. No excitement in her mind over the recollection either! Did he think he had improved that much? She let him know that so far as she was concerned he was the same little George Cutter who used to live across the street and sometimes threw stones at her chickens.

No matter if you are a very handsome young man, with athletic laurels hanging to your college coat tails, you cannot make a deep or flattering impression on a middle-aged woman who has a practical, computing mind and knows the romantic value of her beautiful daughter. If Helen

had been homely, a little, starched mouse of a girl, who could not sing Jerusalem the Golden or anything else, she would have received George's salutations more cordially. As it was, she did not have to be more than invincibly polite. All this she let him know with a flat look of her calm blue eye.

It was a waste of excellent maternal diplomacy so far as he was concerned. He had already turned to Helen. He was almost speechless from having so much to say. She was entirely so for a moment. Then she gave him her hand and managed to say, "Howdy do, George," in a tone a girl uses when the man owes her an apology.

This accusative welcome dashed him. No smile! When he was himself the very pedestal of a smile. Good heavens, what had he done? He was conscious of being innocent; yet he felt guilty.

Mrs. Adams paid no more attention to them. She had gone on, caught up with the Flitches and passed out. This was the only permission he received that he might, if he could, walk with Helen.

The girl's inclemency stirred him as frosty weather stimulates energy. So they followed. I

doubt if they were aware themselves that the distance lengthened between them and other groups of this congregation, which divided and dwindled at every street corner. Lovers are recognized on sight, long before they know themselves to be lovers. People make room for their privacy in public places. These two had a whole block to themselves by the time they entered Wiggs Street. Mrs. Adams had already disappeared in her house. The broad back of Mr. Cutter and the slim back of little Mrs. Cutter were visible for a moment before they also faded through the doorway of the Cutter residence.

Only the Flitches stood *en masse* on their spider-legged veranda, their eyes glued upon these two stragglers, coming slowly down the sunlit street. The Flitches were good people, of the round-eyed breed. They had a candid, perpetually interrogative curiosity which nothing could satisfy. You know the kind. It is never you, but the family that lives across the street from you, or in the next house with thin eyelid curtains over their windows through which they are perpetually regarding you, striving after omniscience about you and your affairs.

Helen had admitted that it was a "nice day" when he said it was, as they came out of the

church and faced the fair brow of this June sabbath.

He had told her how much he enjoyed her solo. It was wonderful.

She merely replied that she "liked to sing."

He was still conscious of being in the arctic region of her regard and cast about, with a lover's distracted compass, to discover the way out. "Weren't you in the bank yesterday afternoon?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," she answered coldly after a slight pause; "I was about to speak to you, but you did not recognize me," she added.

"It is the truth. I did not," he admitted quickly and waited. He could not be sure she got it, the compliment implied. He remembered her as merely sensible, not smart. "You have changed, grown or something," he resumed. "I couldn't be expected to know you. All the other girls here look just as they did when I left here two years ago. But you don't; you are amazingly different. How did you do it?" he exclaimed, regarding her with charmed amazement.

He saw her take it, caught the glance she gave him one instant before she dropped it. The faintest smile sweetened the corners of her mouth. He got that too.

If only he had known of the tears she had shed after the visit to the bank, what a triumph! Fortunately, men do not know what maidens confess with tears to their pillows. If they did it would change many a courtship to one kind or another of ruthless tyranny.

We who study love as if it were a medicine or a disease sometimes speak of "love at first sight," as if this were an unusual seizure. But love is always love at first sight. You may know this man or he may know you for years without getting that angle of vision; but if you ever do, it is as if you had never really seen him before. In a moment you have endowed him with attributes his Maker would never have squandered on a man of that quality. This is what love is, the conferring of virtues and qualities upon the object of your awakened emotion like so many degrees. He may be a drug clerk, or a chicken-breasted, fat man, or a swank young rascal, but from that moment when love gets sight of him he is a fellow of the royal society of heroes, and you may be so bemused you live a lifetime with him, always conferring more degrees to keep him tenderly concealed from your clearer vision. Or it may happen in a year or twenty years the scales fall from your eyes. Then love becomes a serv-

ant, and life a tragedy. But there is nothing in the Scriptures against such a servant or such a life. Rather, I should say the Scriptures make wide and permanent provisions for this deflation in the marital relation.

CHAPTER V

From this day George Cutter spent his spare time in and about the Adams cottage. You might have inferred that he was a homeless man. He accompanied Helen to such entertainments as society consisted of in Shannon, chiefly picnics and fishing excursions at this season of the year. He was by nature an importunate lover, and he was in love. He did not ask himself whether Helen would make a suitable wife for such a man as he was, and would become. He did not know what kind of man he was. He only knew that he wanted this girl, and that no other man should have her.

The decision was natural, entirely creditable. But the approach must be made. So far as he was concerned he was ready to propose to Helen at once; girls, however, were squeamish in matters of love. His instinct warned him that he might lose by an immediate declaration. He spent the time agreeably displaying his wares. He was a university man. He had a smattering of ideas, caught carelesssly and selected from the mouthings of this professor and that. He had

no doubt that he could make an impression. Helen was village born, village bred. It was well enough to startle her into a profound admiration. Nothing subdued and impressed a woman like brains. He not only had brains, he had views.

Bear in mind this was twenty years ago. The muckrakers were still mucking in the best magazines. The "social conscience," a favorite phrase at the time, had passed the period of gestation, and had become a sentimental conviction claimed by the best people. Old patriarchal Russian anarchists with pink whiskers, spewed out of Russia, were pouring into this country, the shade of their whiskers due entirely to the action of the salt air during the voyage over on the dye used upon these whiskers by way of disguise until they were safe in a clean land. They brought their doctrines with them. They created a market for socialism, radicalism and communism.

There was no provision then or even now at Ellis Island to exclude these lepers of decaying civilization afflicted with the most insidious social diseases of the mind. They had a fine time working up conditions which were presently to result in mental, moral and social unrest, strikes and the perversions of all sound doctrines. The universi-

ties in particular received these doctrines gladly —mere theories, so far as the deans and doctors were concerned, upon which they performed intellectual stunts before their classes; trapeze work, nothing more. At that time the most unscrupulous men in this nation were these teachers of youth. Now they may name their converts by the millions; but then the "young gentlemen" who listened had not got a working use of this diablerie. They talked of liberty as if liberty was license by way of appearing swank intellectually.

George had come home that summer fresh cut from the classroom of a certain professor who held advanced views on what men were really entitled to in the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

One evening he was seated beside Helen on a bench beneath an arbor covered with vines of trailing clematis. They had been there a long time. Nothing had happened, to put it exactly as Helen inwardly interpreted the situation. Nothing could happen yet, to put it according to George's decision. He had been home barely two weeks. Helen impressed him as being so ineffably innocent, so remote from his passion that it would be almost an insult to make love to her. Love enjoined silence like the benediction in a church.

They sat beneath the star-white clematis blossoms, confounded with each other. Helen waited. If only he would say something that would ease her of this pain, this humiliation of feeling as she did toward a man who might regard her merely as a friend! She thought he might be interested in her; he had been there almost every evening since his return. But she did not know. What suspense lovers bear when the whole tittering world knows the truth they dare not believe.

George started to smoke, tilted his chin up, expelled a twin bugle of smoke from his nostrils, narrowed his eyes and stared into the immensity of the night. He was very handsome posed like this, and knew it.

Men are much more presumptuously vain than women. They can be vain with no preparation, in their shirt sleeves, with a three days' stubble of beard on their faces and no hair at all on their heads. Their vanity seems to be a sort of rooster-tail instinct, with which they have been endowed so that they may do the work of the world and waste no time primping. It is an illusion, of course, this physical egotism, but the queer thing is that it is an illusion of them shared by most women. So they get away with it. And few of them ever know how purposefully and sardoni-

cally they are afflicted by Nature with homeliness.

On the other hand, when you get down to the psychological facts, I doubt if women are vain at all. They may be beautiful, but even at that they have so little confidence in their beauty that the last one of them must finance her assurance with all the make-believe art of loveliness. I suppose she has discovered that it is not beauty that wins the lover, but it is the deliberate proclamation she thus makes to him of her charms. And this is no illusion. For the history of that grotesque sex is that the average man will pass a naturally beautiful woman every time to pay his court to a painted, powdered and puffed woman who is not nearly so good-looking, if you washed her face and buttoned her up to the neckline of modesty.

Here was Helen, for example, seated beside this young man, all whiteness and sweetness, eyes so blue that even in this moonlit darkness they showed like sunlit skies, lips pink, parted like the petals of a rose, teeth like pearls glistening between—the very emblem of loveliness; and yet she was in an anguish of uncertainty, lest he did not and never would care for her. I don't know —this may be one of the scurvy tricks Nature

plays on women to keep them humble. If so, it is not the only one. I admire the achievements and beauties of Nature as much as any one, but I must say from first to last her methods appear to me unscrupulous.

The silence had grown oppressive. Helen made some slight movement. She probably clasped her hands and squeezed her patience. It was hard to be omitted so long from his thoughts. The rustle she made, faint as it was, recalled him, as he let her know with a glance.

"I was just thinking, Helen, what a sorry little runt of a town this is," he said, lifting his chin a trifle higher over the little runt of a town.

There was a slight pause. You must have a moment in which to adjust yourself to the incredible, especially when you have not been thinking about anything so far removed.

"Shannon?" she asked in an exclamatory tone.

"Yes; it is. You can't imagine how it looks to me after two years away from it, how it compares with the big places I have seen—dried up, sun-baked, no atmosphere, no culture."

She said nothing. What can you say when you hear a man blaspheming the very cradle where he was rocked in infancy. Besides, the contempt

seemed to include her. She was a part of it, and she loved it.

"I saw a handsome plant of some sort blooming in a tin bucket on Mrs. Flitch's front porch the other day. That's what I mean," he went on.

"But what do you mean?" she asked, regarding him vaguely.

"Well, the bucket was tinware, as I said, and published on it, still in red letters, was the red label of a superior shortening." He laughed.

"She is so fond of flowers," Helen expounded gravely.

His eyes snickered at her. "But the bucket," he exclaimed, "the tin bucket, the old tin bucket with the red label—with a gardenia blooming in it. Naïve, I'll admit, but about as appropriate as sticking an ostrich plume over the kitchen sink."

Helen made a hasty mental inventory of the Adams flower pots and thanked heaven they were correct.

"The people here do not think; they merely gossip," he went on. "They have no ideas, no purely mental conceptions. They do not know what is going on in the mind of the world, how men's views of life are changing and broadening."

She did not follow him, but she felt the wind of the world beneath her wing.

"Two years here made no difference. You don't grow. You don't develop. But away in a university, where your business is to get what's going and learn to think, two years change a man. I am a stranger here now. My own father and mother do not know me."

"Oh, George, yes, they do!" she exclaimed consolingly.

Then she caught his eye and perceived that he was in no need of consolation. He was boasting, prouder than otherwise of being this stranger. "It's a fact; they make me feel like a whited sepulcher," he complained.

"But you don't," she exclaimed loyally, but really in great trepidation lest he might be this awful thing.

"Of course not," he returned, pleased to have excited her anxiety. "But what would my father think if he knew I am interested in socialism, that my best friends in the university are radicals?"

She was not competent to express an opinion. She was not skilled in politics.

"And what would my mother think if she knew that I no longer accept the Scriptures literally as she does, as you all do in this town; that I know

the Bible to be fragments of history and tradition, much of it mythical, the priestly literature of the Jews, gathered from dreams and hearsay, and interpreted to control the lives and liberties of men."

"Oh, George! you must not say such things. You are a member of the church. I remember the Sunday morning when you were baptized."

"A public bath! And there is no 'the Church,' Helen; did you know that—unless it's the world; that's the big church," said this grand young man, delivered from the faith of his fathers.

This was awful. She stared at him through tears, but not with any shrinking; rather her heart yearned toward him. There is no doubt about this—all women, however young, have wings and a sort of clucking mind, spiritually speaking.

He was moved by the sight of these tears to a loftier, transient mood of himself. He turned so as to face her, seized her hand, bent his brows upon her in a strained, long look. It was powerful, this gaze. She trembled. Her hand became icy in his hot palm. He tightened his clasp upon it.

"Listen, Helen," in the deep bass tones of a terrific emotion, "I wish you to know me as I am.

I would not take advantage of a girl like you. I will keep nothing from you. It is necessary if —if my hopes are realized." He left her in this suspense while he bowed his head and struggled to stem his tide. "I am not a good man," he began. It was the opening sentence of a proclamation, not a confession, as if he had said: "I have a cloven foot and am proud of it." "But I have my convictions, and no man on God's green earth is more faithful to his convictions."

She was holding her breath, only letting it out when she could hold it no longer in a soft sigh, and taking in another for the next sigh. If you are doing it for exercise you call it "deep breathing."

"And I have my ideals," he added impressively.

She was relieved. If he was not an entirely good man, he could not be a bad one; he had "convictions" and he had "ideals." What more could she ask?

"For example, I believe in the freedom of love," he announced, and waited for this shocking piece of news to take effect.

The effect was marvelous. Her cheeks bloomed scarlet. Nature flung a wreath of palest pink upon her forehead—only for an instant; then this

aurora of love's emotion faded. "I am afraid I don't know much about love," she said faintly, lowering her eyes before his gaze.

He leaned back, gratified. He had her secret; but she had not got his meaning. The dear little innocent! He was tempted to kiss her.

This was really the case. She had not recognized the phrase. There was no use for it in Shannon. The worst thing she had ever heard was Sammy Duncan swearing at the cat. Her reading had been sternly censored. Mrs. Adams took no morning paper, "on account of Helen"; a magazine, yes; and there were Scott's novels. These had been the girl's text books of love. She had never even read the Song of Solomon. Mrs. Adams had forbidden her this richer scriptural food. "You won't understand it," the mother had said. And Helen obediently skipped it when she turned the pages of her Bible. She had secretly wondered why Solomon was in the Bible anyway. He was not a proper person, if one believed the preacher, and one must do that. Neither was David all he should have been by all accounts. But here she veered again and merely learned her Psalms, making no inquiries into the author's private life, which was very ladylike of her. In short, brought up according to a stand-

ard of innocence which amounted to a deformity, at this moment she was stripped of every weapon by which she might have defended herself against an iniquitous doctrine.

George decided not to go too fast with his teaching on this subject, for he was determined that she should learn it and accept it. He kissed her hand instead and told her that she was all there was of love so far as he was concerned.

CHAPTER VI

From this time their affair progressed with reeling swiftness. Helen assumed an air of independence, as if she had suddenly come into possession of a private fortune. This is ever the effect of riches upon the meekest of us. She was now a lovely young insurrection in her mother's house. She had opinions and expressed them boldly in opposition to those of her mother.

This had never happened before. Mrs. Adams was astonished, but she conformed to the natural order of parents. She abdicated, merely trailing clouds of futile protests as she descended, also after the manner of parents. You may manage a son in love by putting the financial brakes on him; but you can do literally nothing with a daughter in love, because her sense of responsibility is purely devotional and sentimental. She will risk a husband because she will not be obliged to support him. This is the difference, which she may discover afterwards does not exist. But she thinks it does, which comes to the same thing.

If you are a girl you cannot stir up any great

issue. Helen simply made those within her reach. For one thing she decided to wear "pink."

"But blue is your color," Mrs. Adams objected.

"But it is not one of my principles, mother. I am tired of blue. I have worn it all my life as a rabbit wears one kind of skin. I'm human. I can wear any color."

And she did. She tried every shade of the rainbow that summer. She was extravagant.

"Helen, where are your economies?" Mrs. Adams exclaimed, as if she referred to certain necessary fastenings on the feminine character.

This was a day in August, when Helen wanted yet another hat and frock.

"They were never mine; they were yours, mother," was the unfeeling reply. "I want the dress and the hat."

"You have had two hats this season."

"This one then will make three."

Clothes had become her obsession, a silent way she had of extorting admiration from George.

"Well, if this keeps up I cannot afford to send you away to school this fall," Mrs. Adams told her.

"I don't want to go away to school. I am tired of being just taught. I want to do my own learning," Helen informed her.

And when you consider how simple she was, this was a rather profound thing to say. The desire to chase our own knowledge is as old as Eve. But from then until now it has led to a sort of independent, sweating self-respect. We pay the highest price of all for it, as Helen was destined to learn—among other things. But I reckon it is worth it, if anything is worth what we pay for the experience by which life unfolds.

Mrs. Adams was not crushed by this flare of ingratitude. She was simply confirmed in her suspicions.

Meanwhile Mr. Cutter, Senior, was also confirmed in his suspicions. Young George informed him early in August that he just about had enough of the university; he believed the wisest thing for him to do under the circumstances was to settle down to business. He did not name the circumstances, but by this time everybody knew what they were, including Mr. Cutter.

"You are of age—your own man; the decision rests with you," he had said to George on this occasion, by way of washing his hands of any responsibility, after the cool-headed manner of fathers.

As a matter of fact, he was very well satisfied. Helen Adams was a good girl; pretty; she would

eventually inherit some property. Besides, he thought George had better settle early in life, else he might not settle at all.

"I've made the decision," said George, like a man in a hurry. "With the hope of getting a raise in salary soon," he added, with a note of financial stress in his voice.

"Oh, I guess we could manage that in case of an emergency," his father replied in the same matter-of-fact tones.

This is the way men deal with one another, even if somewhere behind the dealing deathless love is at stake. And it is not the way women deal with one another. For some reason, when they settle down in their years, and recover the powers of sight according to reason, they are ready to inflict death on love upon the slightest provocation.

Mrs. Adams suddenly and for no apparent cause ceased to speak to Mrs. Cutter. And Mrs. Cutter with no apparent reason began to refer to Helen as "that Adams girl." The mother of a son is always jealous. She over-estimates him; no matter whom he chooses for a wife, she thinks he might have done better. Mrs. Cutter was free to tell anybody, and did tell quite a number, that she hoped George would marry sometime; but

when he did it was natural that she should wish him to choose a girl who would be equal to the position he could give her in the world. George had a future before him. He was no ordinary young man. By these sentiments she left you to infer what she thought of the "Adams girl." If you ask me, I say she was correct in her opinion, but futilely so.

Mrs. Adams knew that her daughter could not do better in a worldly way than to marry this young man. But when it came to the pinch, she forgot the world and thought anxiously of Helen. She was a good mother. Her instinct, sharpened by years of living in a world where love plays havoc with hopes and happiness, warned her that while George might settle down in business and become eminently successful, she doubted if he could be domesticated in the strictly marital virtues. He had too much temperament. Perhaps this was the way she had of admitting that Helen was a trifle short on temperament, even if she did have a good singing voice. On the other hand, Helen had the awful sanity of seeing things as they are. She had observed this walking mind of her daughter—no wings upon which to carry illusions. How would such a woman adjust herself to a husband who might have recurrent

periods of adolescence? She did not know. Therefore she regarded George with a hostile beam in her eye and quit speaking to Mrs. Cutter.

When you consider the seismic disturbances created about them by only two lovers and multiply them by all the other lovers to the uttermost parts of the earth, it is clear that there never can be any lasting peace in this world, though disarmament might be complete, and all nations might pass a law confirming peace and good will. For this is a natural disturbance beyond the diplomacy of diplomats or of confederated congresses to control. It is the perpetual insurrection of life everlasting in the terms of love, which are never peaceful terms.

Some time during this August, probably the latter part, Helen wore her third degree hat and the new frock. This hat lies now in an old trunk above the attic stairs in the house of Helen. I have seen it. A leghorn with a wide floppy brim, stiff, a little askew and out of shape, as you would be yourself if you had lain so long without so much as a breath of wind to stir you. There is a good deal of lace and ribbon on it and a wreath of wild roses. It looks funny, as a hat always does when it is long out of style, or as a love letter reads when you have been married twenty

years to the man who wrote it. But with all there remained something gay and confident about this hat, like the wistful smile and sweetness of a girl's face, as no doubt there remains in the latter those former scriptures of a valorous love.

Helen was standing beside me when I fished up this little ghost of a hat and held it up in the warm light of the attic. "Put it on," I exclaimed, not meaning to be irreverent.

"No; oh, no," she said, drawing back. "It would not become me now."

And it would not, any more than the love letter would have become the sentiments of the poor, tired, old, middle-aged husband who wrote it long ago.

But what I set out to tell when the former Helen's hat intrigued me was that she went for a walk with George the first time she wore it. Shannon at that time was such a brief little town that you could step out of it into the open country almost at once.

They took the river road, which was not in very good repute with the guardians and parents of Shannon, for no better reason than that it was sanctified by the vows of so many lovers. But what would you have? These lovers require pri-

vacy and some fairness of scenery for their business. You may involuntarily publish love on a street corner, but you cannot declare it there. Your very nature revolts at the idea. So does society. You would be arrested for staging a love scene in public. Old people are not reasonable about this. Parental parlor-supervision has produced more unhappy old maids than the homely features of these victims.

When they had come some distance along the road, George drew her arm in his, and they went on in this beatific silence. "Helen," he said, "if you should say anything, what would you say?"

She looked, caught his red brown eyes smiling down at her and blushed. "Why, I was not going to say anything. I was just thinking," she answered.

"What?" he insisted.

"How happy I am now, this moment, and—" she halted.

"Well, go on."

"Well, just how easy it is to be happy. How little it really takes to make happiness," she answered truthfully.

"Just you and me," he agreed.

They went on again walking slowly.

"I never loved a girl before," he informed her, as if they had been discussing this miracle of love in open speech for hours.

She believed him. We always do believe them when they tell us this, because we need so much to keep this happiness which is founded upon the shifting sands of lovers.

"And you, my beautiful one, you do love me?" he asked, suddenly halting and swinging her in front of him.

She laid her hand upon her breast, looked at him through a mist of tears. "Is this love?" she asked, as if her hand covered leaves and blossoms and singing birds.

"Of course it is," cried her high priest, clasping her and kissing her.

"Are you sure?" she gasped, with another wide look of joyful fear.

"Absolutely!"

"But, George, how can you know for certain, if you've never loved before?"

Sometimes I think for every woman love is an alarm bell which rings perpetually to disturb her peace. It really was a staggering question she had asked, and George staggered like a man. "You know what you feel is love, don't you?" he evaded.

"What I feel is terror and happiness."

"Well, that's love for you. This is love for me," he exclaimed, kissing her again. "And to know that you are mine entirely, aren't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

The conversation of lovers in fiction rarely tallies with what they actually say to each other in real life. I have read the dialogue of many a brilliant courtship in a novel, but never as an eavesdropper or observer have I known two people in love to utter a single sentence which was sensible or that even escaped absurdity, if you repeated it along with other gossip you have to tell. And yet it is very important, this primer talk, these watching eyes of lovers who place the profoundest significance upon the most trivial act, or even the wavering of a glance between them.

I merely say this in passing, as a challenge to the reader, who may feel a trifle let down, disappointed at the above record of what took place between George and Helen on that day. What I have written is the artless truth of love, not the fabricated philosophy of love, because there is no such philosophy. Love is a state of being beyond our academic powers to expound. It exists, it functions amazingly and that is all we know about it or ever will know about it, the passion-

mongers and biologists to the contrary, notwithstanding. They shed no light on this phenomenon, only upon the obvious material results. They do in truth obscure it by gratifying your desire, dear reader, to indulge vicariously in something not suitable to the proper furnishing of your elegant mind.

CHAPTER VII

The ruins of an old iron foundry stood on this river road. The roof had fallen in long ago. The walls and gables, built of rough stone alone remained. Creeping vines covered them. The sun dipping low upon the horizon shone through the open places where windows had been. But the shadows were already deepening in the great, open doorway beside the road.

Helen was for turning back now. She was all brisked up with the desire to hurry home with this sweet burden of happiness.

"No, let's go up there," he said, making a gesture toward this door.

They climbed the slope from the road, hand in hand, and sat upon a long stone step, the fields before them changing already beneath the lavender mists of twilight, the river singing below, the bright squares of sunlight fading from the black smoked walls within, the shadows in there deepening to darkness behind them. But what soft effulgence in this girl's face! Already the candles upon her altar burned. For so many years she kept that look of pale candle light in the dark.

Her features changed; the skin lost its rosy glow; her beauty passed away; but this serene brightness never faded. When I knew her long afterwards she was in the full bloom of her years, her eyes of that calmer blue women get when all the storms of love and loving have passed and left the heart motionless with the awful peace of victory over love. And she was still thinking of love, as one recalls an epitaph!

Besides the happiness of having her beside him, clasped like a banner to his side, George had something to say. He must make Helen understand one thing, and he thought he could do this now without risking his happiness. He did not anticipate that any emergency would ever arise between them that would force him to fall back on this conviction about love; but he had it; he had studied the science of social ethics in the university—an illuminating subject under a singularly broad-minded doctor of philosophy named Herron.

The ethics were binding, of course, but between the lines and the laws Herron interpolated his own views on love. He had more than once attacked what he called the barbarous "contract of marriage." Divorce was one of the articles of his creed. When Nature called for a separation

of the contracting parties, it was abominable not to yield to this natural law, otherwise you profaned that most sacred of all things—love, and so on and so forth.

George entertained a profound respect for Herron. Most of the young men in his classes did. Still, they referred to him as "that fellow Herron," and discussed his views more than they did those of any other member of the faculty. In this way George had obtained one of his strongest convictions, a sort of pet moral; and as he had already taken occasion to inform Helen, "no man on God's green earth was more faithful to his convictions."

"You know what I believe about love," he began, drawing her closer to him according to this faith, it appeared.

"Me!" she answered with charming confidence.

"Oh, yes," kissing her; "you are love, and my life."

She sighed.

"That is why I believe in the freedom of love," he began again. "There can be no bondage—ever—in love."

"Only the vows we take," she whispered.

"Yes, of course, marriage," he admitted.

"It is like being confirmed—in love—isn't it?"

"Why, yes, for those who love."

"And we do," she said.

"Yes, indeed," he returned heartily—and hurriedly, if she had noticed; for she was getting off on the wrong tack, and he wanted to say what he had to say before this wind filled her sails. "But it is by love, not law, that you chose me; isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, my love," she answered softly.

"Otherwise you would not take me," he went on.

"But I do love you."

"But if the time ever came when—when you ceased to care for me—" he stammered and did not finish, feeling her stiffen as if by a resolve in his arms.

"It could not come, such a time," she interrupted, "because I could never cease to love you."

"I know it, my sweetheart," speaking with tender gratitude, "but I am only supposing the case, that if either of us ceased to care—"

She tore herself from him. She covered him with her wide, blue gaze. "Could you—cease to care?" she demanded.

"Absolutely no! You are my very life. I think, live and hope everything in terms of you," he assured her.

But she was not assured. She remained apart,

no longer yielding to his arms about her. "Well, why think about what will not happen?" she asked.

"I told you we were only supposing—"

"Not I?"

"—that if you or I," he went on determined to make his point, "ceased to love, it would be profanation to—pretend—to live as if we did, wouldn't it?"

"But, George," with a note of pain, with the brightening of tears in her eyes, "we shall be one. It says so everywhere, in the Bible, in the vows we take, that we are one flesh. Then how can either of us cease to love?"

"We won't; we never shall," he cried eloquently, and drawing her fearful, only half-willing in a close embrace. "But I must be honest with you. This is my conviction, the sanctity and freedom of love."

"It sounds well, but it feels dangerous," she whispered.

"Don't you believe in me, Helen?" in an offended tone.

"I do, oh, I do; but not in your conviction," she moaned.

"What difference does it make, my heart? We love. We have chosen each other," he laughed.

"Forever?" she wanted to know.

"Forever!" he repeated with emphasis.

She leaned close to his side, her head upon his breast, her eyes closed, lips parted, white teeth gleaming. He knew for certain that nothing could separate him from this goodness, this sweetness, this loveliness. He merely wished to be on the level, to conceal nothing from her that concerned them so nearly. He kissed her rapturously.

She opened her eyes, human violets, blue like these flowers, innocent like a maid, but troubled as if far away cold winds were sweeping down. "Do you feel the wind?" she said.

"There is no wind."

"Yes; and cold; I feel the chill."

"The air from the river," he said, releasing her.

"And the sun is down. It is late. We must go," she said.

They went back down the slope to the road, hand in hand as they had come up, but not the same. The pain which accompanies love had entered her heart.

She was never to be perfectly easy again. No woman ever is who loves. Some months, some days, at last a few hours and a few moments of happiness she was to have with which to bal-

ance the years of life with love and this pain. But ask her! She will tell you that they were worth more than the years. So many more women than we know are like that.

Once when they were near the town, he looked at her happily and said: "I have not told you the news. It concerns you, too, now. I got a raise in salary yesterday."

"I am so glad," she answered smiling.

"Oh, I deserved it. I am making good. Father knows it," he put in.

"You do work hard," she agreed.

"But not near as hard as I mean to work now —for you," he assured her.

She tightened her fingers upon his in reply.

"I mean to be a successful man, Helen, for you. You shall have everything."

"I need only you," she answered.

"The world is a wolf, did you know that?"

She did not, she said.

"Yes, it is; and the man that makes good in it has got to be a wolf too."

The lamb looked up at the wolf and smiled. She was merely noticing for the hundredth time how handsome he was, and wishing he had compared himself to a lion. She preferred to think of him as a lion.

PART TWO

PART TWO

CHAPTER VIII

Three days after the homing birds flitting about the old foundry on the river road witnessed the betrothal of George and Helen, Mrs. George William Cutter was seen to issue from her residence at five o'clock in the afternoon. It was barely possible at any time to do this on Wiggs Street without being observed by the secret eyes of your neighbors and exciting a purely private interest in where you were going. But it was absurdly impossible for Mrs. Cutter to have escaped on this occasion without exciting the liveliest curiosity, owing to the way she looked and her obvious destination, as compared with what she had been saying quite freely for the last three months to any one who wanted to know what her feelings and opinions were concerning a certain matter.

Her hair was crimped, although this was Thursday and she never put it up on hairpins except on Saturday nights "for Sunday." She wore a small,

glistening, lavender straw hat wreathed in lilacs of that shade of pink grown only by milliners. A helpless thing securely pinned on, which somehow gave the impression of having involuntarily drawn back from her face in a mild flowerlike terror of this face. Any one seeing her might have understood the feelings of this hat. Her countenance seemed to burn, probably from the summer heat, possibly from some fiery emotion. Her red brown eyes spat sparks, her neck was bowed until she accomplished what Nature had not designed she should have, a wrinkle that made a thin double chin.

Her frock was of gray silk, high at the neck, tight at the waist, full in the skirt, "garnished" with three graduated bands of satin ribbon above a flounce at the bottom. It rustled richly as she walked, and she fairly crimped the ground as she walked, taking short, emphatic steps, as if the high heels of her slippers were stings with which she stung whatever was lawful for an indignant woman to sting with her heels.

She was on her way to Helen Adams and her mother. She had tried to reason with George about this hasty marriage. She had pointed out to him that while the girl was a nice girl, and so on and so forth, only to have George fling

out of the room as if she had insulted him. She had talked to Mr. Cutter about it, who had told her briefly, if not rudely, that she had better mind her own business and leave these young people to attend to theirs since they would do it, anyhow. As if George was not, and had not been, her own and chief business from the day of his birth. She had moped and suffered these three days. At last she had resolved to do her duty, since it was the only thing left that she could do. She would go and call on the Adamses, "recognize" them, and thus by the sacrifice of her pride and convictions, reinstate herself with George.

The lot of a mother was a sad one! She had the pangs by which her child, in this case a son, was born. She nursed him. She had the care of him, never thinking of herself. Then when he was old enough to give her some returns, he goes off against her advice and gives himself to another woman who, she knows, and will live to see, is unsuited to him, and on top of all this she must sacrifice her feelings, stultify herself, bootlick George by going over there! She was so moved to pity of herself that the imminence of tears reminded her that she had forgotten her handkerchief. She went back to get it, thus keep-

ing the neighbors in suspense, because she had to stop and powder her nose after blowing it.

This time she came out, moving swiftly and rustlingly across the street to the Adams cottage. She did not doubt that she would be received cordially there. She did not know that Mrs. Adams had ceased to "speak" to her some time ago, because she had never been more than civil to Mrs. Adams, and therefore would not have known if that lady had passed a year without speaking to her.

She was received, of course, but by no stretch of imagination could the reception have been called cordial. Mrs. Adams did it. She asked her in, and admitted coolly that yes, Helen was at home. She would "tell" her. She went out to do this. Mrs. Cutter's eyes took one flight about the room. She made the best of what she saw. There certainly were some good pieces of golden oak in it. She wondered if the girl would be allowed to take her piano when she married. She hoped—

Mrs. Adams returned, large, serene, dignified, very cool. She hoped Mrs. Cutter had been well?

Oh, yes, quite well, thanks.

Then she told Mrs. Cutter voluntarily that if she had not been worried to death about Helen

she supposed she might have been in her usual health.

Mrs. Cutter raised her brows and said she hoped there was nothing the matter with Helen.

Oh, no, the child was well and sillily happy, but this engagement!

The two women stared at each other, ice and fire in these looks. Mrs. Cutter was astounded. Did her ears deceive her? They did not.

Mrs. Adams was speaking in her large, welkin-ringing voice, distinctly audible in the street, across the street, for that matter. Helen was too young to marry, she was saying. She had not finished school. She had expected to give her the best advantages in music. Helen had talent, a future before her. But what good would talent do a married woman?

She asked Mrs. Cutter this and paused for a reply if Mrs. Cutter could make one. Evidently she could not.

No good in the world! Mrs. Adams retorted by way of answering herself. The less personal promise she had of a future, the better it was for a married woman. To have a gift in you that you could not develop made for unhappiness. And what time would Helen have for her music now? None. What use would she have for it?

Practically none. And Helen had a very nice little talent for drawing. She had painted several placques, waving her hand at the evidences of her daughter's art on the walls of the parlor. It was there—a placque the size of a dinner plate full of pansies, another one with roses painted on it.

Mrs. Cutter's eyes flew up obedient to these artless efforts in art, and immediately resumed their position on Mrs. Adams' face, which was as full of meaning as the portrait of a Dutch mother done by an old master.

"Of course you don't know how I feel about it. You have never had a daughter," she told Mrs. Cutter. "But I can tell you what it means. Your whole life is centered in her. You sacrifice and plan for her. You think she is yours. Well, you are mistaken. She belongs to some man she has never seen. About the time you are beginning to have some peace and satisfaction in her, he comes and gets her, marries her, regardless of you. Then you spend the rest of your life watching her do her duty by him, go through what you have gone through in your own married life, if not worse, when if you could only have had your way a little while it would have been so different, and—"

Fortunately she did not finish this sentence. Helen came in at this moment and gave a sweeter, politer turn to the conversation.

Mrs. Cutter had intended to discuss the situation—in a kind way of course, but frankly. She wanted to give some advice, let Helen know how important it was for her to exert every effort to fit herself for the position she would have in the Cutter family. But she did nothing of the kind. She said a few pleasant things, kissed the girl cordially on both cheeks and hoped George would make her happy, to which Helen replied that he had already made her happy. Then she took her leave.

Helen accompanied her to the door, Mrs. Adams remained in the parlor. She had seen Mrs. Cutter's transit across the street when she came to make this call. She had read truly the mood of George's mother. And she had attended to her. She had let her know a thing or two. Now she stood behind the parlor curtains watching her again cross the street. This time it was less in the nature of a transit, she perceived, nodding her head grimly. Mrs. Cutter's neck was limber, her proud look had disappeared. Her hat, although she had not touched it, was tilted absurdly to one side, as if an invisible blow had

struck it. And she was walking hurriedly, like a person in retreat.

Mrs. Cutter barely made it across her own doorsill before she began to wring her hands. Oh! her Father in heaven, what kind of mother-in-law would that woman make to poor Georgie? She received no immediate answer to this interrogative prayer. We never do. An answer to prayer comes when you wait until it is worked out somewhere in life. Her own suspicions answered it clearly enough, however; she must knuckle to some sort of courtship of that old Adams woman, or there was no telling what might happen.

She had taken it for granted that George would bring his wife to his own home. One look at Mrs. Adams convinced her that if the young couple lived with anybody they would live with Helen's mother. That would never do! Since George was determined to marry the girl the only wise course to follow would be to give him a home of his own. She would tell Mr. Cutter so, and why. He could afford to do something for George. He might make him a wedding present of the old Carrol place. It would cost something to repair the house, but anything would be better than sitting across the street and seeing George domesticated in the Adams home.

All this is important to set down in order that you may realize the difficulty so many young people have in disentangling themselves from the lives of their elders and starting out for themselves. We have escaped the old tribal instinct in everything more than in this. The son is persuaded to bring his wife into his father's house, or he does do it for the sake of economy. Nothing can be more disintegrating to the welding and growth of such a marriage.

But the chief reason I have recorded what happened on this day is because it was by this accident of maternal jealousy that Helen came into possession of her house. So far from believing in any sort of orderly destiny, my belief is that the Fates which change and control our lives are as uncertain as the flight of birds. The world about us is filled with contending forces.

Some one whom you never saw or heard of looks at the ticker in his office and sells out that day. The next day that little package of bonds or stock in your safety-deposit box is not worth the embossed paper they are written on. Or, you turn a street corner, meet a man, walk two blocks with him, learn from him something about this same market which he does not know he has told in the course of his conversation, and you get the

opportunity to become a rich man in this same market before night. Or, you who have always been a reasonably decent young man meet the eyes of a woman in a crowded place, and you pass on with her to a fate which leads to every dishonor. You had no intention of doing such a thing; it is contrary to your principles and your habits; but you do it. So many are subject to these whirlwinds of fate that you cannot tell by looking at them or even by hearing them pray which ones are steady and safe from disaster. It all depends upon the compass within whether we swing at the right moment into the right current.

Just so, if Mrs. Adams had not resented the bow of Mrs. Cutter's neck, the offensive emphasis of her little wrinkle of a double chin, when she came to make that call, she might have received her amiably. And if Mrs. Cutter had been received amiably, her maternal jealousy might not have been so aroused and she would not have persuaded Mr. Cutter to give George the Carrol place. In that case the House of Helen might have been some other house, or no house at all. And her life would have been in all probability a different kind of existence. Because the house in which a woman lives, moves and does her duties, determines her character

much more than the bank does in which her husband transacts his affairs.

If the reader is another woman, and has spent her spare time for nearly forty years, as I have, in a sort of involuntary study of men, she knows, as well as I do, that there is nothing you can see with the naked eye or put even your gloved finger on that does determine the character of a man. He never breaks his own personal confidence. It is no use to keep either your eye or your finger on him. You will never know him unless he goes to pieces like the one-horse shay, after which it is very unfortunate to know him at all. I am putting this down merely to give you a line on how effervescently Helen came into possession of her house, though it seemed so natural that she should have it, and to warn you that while you think you know what will happen in this story, you do not know, because you do not know George. You do not, even if your own husband is a similar George.

CHAPTER IX

There is an old copy of the Shannon *Sentinel*, dated October 17, 1902, which contains an account of the Adams-Cutter marriage. It lies folded in the trunk with Helen's last girlhood hat, and a few other things of that tearful nature. I do not know why women keep these little yellowed and faded tokens of past hopes, unless it is for the same reason they devote themselves cheerfully and industriously to the cultivation of flower gardens on their cemetery lots where their dead lie so deeply buried.

The dim type still tells how the altar in this church was decorated with flowers and ferns, who played the wedding march and who performed the ceremony. The bride was the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the late Sam Adams and Mrs. Mary Adams.

"Late" is the adjective you get, instead of the plain civilian title of "Mister" you had while you were in the flesh. It depends whether this exchange implies demotion or immortal inflation. But there can be no doubt about the significance of "Sam" in this connection. Mr. Adams was a

carpenter, and a good one, but he never received credit in this present world for the concluding, dignifying syllables of his Christian name.

In this same paragraph it tells how the bride was dressed, who her attendants were and what they wore. And simmers down in the last sentence to a description of the gowns worn by the respective mothers of the bride and groom. The word "exeunt" does not occur, of course; but that lick-and-a-promise praise of their toilettes really implies that this is the last prominent appearance of these worthy women.

The concluding paragraph is devoted to the groom. And it is evident that the writer saved his most obsequious words for this final flare of flattery. The groom was the son of "our distinguished fellow townsman, Mr. George William Cutter"—a "university man"; some reference was made to his "sterling qualities" and bright future. He had recently "accepted" a position in the First National Bank where he had already "made an enviable record"—cordial finger pointing to "bright future." "The young couple left on the noon train for a wedding tour in the East. Upon their return they will take up their residence in their new home on Wiggs Street."

You and I may both believe that either one of

us could have written a better account of this wedding, imparted more dignity to the occasion, as undoubtedly a real artist might paint a more pleasing portrait of you or me. But for a naïvely truthful likeness, we both know that a country-town photographer surpasses the artist when it comes to portraying the warped noses of our countenances, the worried eye and the mouths we really have. This is why we avoid his brutal veracity when we can afford the expense. Neither one of us cares to leave the very scriptures of our faces to appall posterity.

In the same manner, I contend there is always an artless charm, a sweet and scandalous candor in what appears in a country newspaper, which is more refreshing and informing than the elegance of our best writers in the use of words. For example, does not the *Sentinel's* account furnish a clearer picture and even a more intimate interpretation of this bride and groom and the whole scene, than you could possibly receive of a fashionable wedding from the social columns of a big city paper? Personally, I have frequently been offended by the cool, bragging insolence of these announcements of city weddings, as if all we were entitled to know is that they can afford the pomp and circumstance; nothing about their "bright fu-

ture," or the bride's "accomplishments," or the groom's "sterling qualities" to bid for our interest and good will. Why swagger in print about being married? It is not a thing to boast about, but to be humble about, and to entreat the prayers of all Christian people, that they may behave themselves, keep their vows and do the square thing by each other and society.

George and Helen returned to Shannon and their new home on Wiggs Street the last of October.

Helen was far more beautiful than she had ever been, with that sedate air young wives acquire before they are becalmed by the stupefying monotony of love, peace and duty. The lines in George's handsome young face were firmer. He had that look of resolution men of his type show, before it is confirmed into the next look of arrogance and success.

When Helen and George became engaged in August the Carrol house was simply an old gray farmhouse, overtaken years ago by the spreading skirts of Shannon, but never assimilated. This was due to the fact that when Wiggs Street was lengthened, it must be made straight whatever happened. The old house was left far to one side on a wide lawn. No one lived in it. Altheas and

roses bloomed among the weeds, like gentle folk who have lost their station in life and make common lot with the mean and the poor. Grass grew between the bricks of the walk which led to the front door. There was a hedge of bulbous-bodied boxwood on either side of this walk. The windows of the old house looked out on this green and growing desolation with the vacant stare they always have in an empty house.

But since the end of August carpenters, plasterers and painters had swarmed over it and through it. Laborers had cleaned and cleared and pruned. At last came van loads of carpets, furniture and draperies. These had been smoothed, placed and hung inside. Now it looked like the same old house that had suddenly come into a modest fortune, gone to town and bought itself a lot of nice things to wear. Not a gable had been changed, but the new roof had been painted green. The walls were so white that they glistened. The windows were so clean that they looked like the bright eyes of a lady with her veil lifted.

On the evening of her first day in this house, Helen stood on the veranda waiting for George, watching the elm leaves sweeping past, a golden shower in the November wind. She had been very busy all day, not that there was anything to

do, because everything had been done. But she had been going over her possessions, feeling the fullness and vastness of her estate. She had silver, yes, and fine linen. Her furniture was good, golden oak, every piece. Her rugs were florescent, very cheerful.

She needed more furniture; the rooms looked sparsely settled, especially the parlor. A bookcase would help, and a few pictures on the walls, but all in good time. She would be contented, ask for nothing else. She meant to be a thrifty, helpful wife, do her own work, take care of George. She was simply speechlessly happy. So it was just as well she had no one to talk to. She wished to be alone except for George, to concentrate upon all this joy. It seemed too good to be true. She had this house, to be sweetened into a home, and all these things; above and transcending everything, she had George. She was absolutely sure of him. Is there anything more certain than sunshine when the sun shines?

This day was a criterion of all her days. She was very busy. She expected to find time for her music, and to read a little. She must keep up with what was going on for George's sake, so that she would be an intelligent companion for him. But she never found time; besides, George

cared less than she had supposed for music, and he was strangely indifferent to intelligent conversation, seeing what an intelligent man he was.

Sometimes she returned a few calls, merely from a sense of duty. She was never lonely. Sometimes her mother came to lunch and spent the afternoon. On Sundays they went to church and had dinner with George's father and mother. As the months passed, Mrs. Cutter frequently asked her how she "felt." She always felt well and told her so. She did not notice that Mrs. Cutter took little pleasure in her abounding health. The spring and summer passed. She was very busy in her garden among the flowers.

One day Mrs. Adams warned her against taking so much violent exercise.

"But why?" Helen asked, standing up with a trowel in her hand, radiantly flushed.

Mrs. Adams said nothing. She merely measured her daughter this way and that with a sort of tape-line gaze.

"I like working out here, and I am perfectly well," Helen insisted.

"A married woman never knows when she is perfectly well. It is your duty to be careful," was the reply.

Helen flushed and remained silent. She felt

that her mother was staring at her inquisitively through this silence as she had sometimes seen her peep through the drawn curtains before a window to satisfy her curiosity or her anxiety.

When at last Mrs. Adams took her departure, Helen went in, closed the door of her room and sat down on the side of her bed.

I do not know how it is with men, but there are thoughts a woman cannot think if the door is open, even if there is not another soul in the house. Helen was now engaged in this sort of secret-prayer contemplation of herself, a slim, pretty figure, sitting with her knees crossed, hands folded, lips parted, eyes fixed in a long blue gaze upon the clean white walls of this room.

So that was it! She was the object of—anticipation which had not been—rewarded. The color in her cheeks deepened. She recalled this question, that remark, made by George's mother. She understood the curious look of suspense with which Mrs. Cutter frequently regarded her. She wished to remind her of a duty she owed the Cutter family. The meaning of it all was perfectly clear to her now. As if it was anybody's business! She was indignant by this time. She began to shake one foot. Her eyes flew this way and that, like the wings of a distracted bird. She

was really arguing fiercely with George's mother, saying the things which we never dare to say in fact. She flounced, bobbing up and down on the springs beneath her, set her impatient foot down, closed her lips firmly and looked really fierce. Evidently she was getting the better of this argument, chiefly, no doubt, because Mrs. Cutter was not there.

Suddenly she lifted her left hand, counted the fingers and in turn used up all the fingers of her right hand in this triumphant enumeration. Yes, she had been married exactly ten months. Not a year yet. Why was everybody in such a hurry, even her mother?

Then something happened. She became very still, as you do sometimes when the future, which always keeps its bright back to you, suddenly turns around and permits you to behold the face of the years to come. The color faded from her cheeks; her eyes widened into a look of terror. She gave a gasp and buried her face in the pillow.

Oh, God, oh, her Father in heaven, suppose it should always be like this! Suppose she lived to be an old woman and never had a child. Doing just the same things over, alone in the house. Nothing to look forward to all day except George's return at the end of it. And nothing

for him to expect except herself coming from the kitchen to welcome him and hurrying back again, lest something burned or boiled over if she delayed a moment. What would she be in her husband's house if she did not become a mother to his children?

She sprang to her feet and tore off the pink apron she was wearing over her summer frock. "I shall be a servant, nothing else," she cried, tidying her hair before the mirror. "I shall grow old and gray; my skin will be yellow and, if I don't —if we do not have children, I shall begin presently to look like a good servant, the kind that never gives notice, but just stays on and dies in the family. Oh!"

She flew back to the bed, cast herself upon it and wept aloud to the ceiling.

An audience makes hypocrites of us all. The very mirror in your room will do it. The best acting is always done in secret. If you could see that little mouse of a woman whom you never suspect of having more than the timid sniff of an emotion, charging up and down the room in her nightdress, tearing her hair and raving with her eyes, making no sound lest you should hear her, you would be astonished. And she might be no less amazed if she could see you carrying

on like a proud female Cicero, delivering the mere gestures of an eloquent oration. No acting we ever see on the stage equals the histrionic ability of the least talented woman when it comes to these bed-chamber theatricals of her secret emotions.

Helen was calmer when George returned from the bank an hour later. She met him as usual. But the sight of him unnerved her. She flung herself upon his breast and clung to him, as if a strong wind was blowing which might sweep her away from him forever.

"Helen! My heart, what is the matter?" he exclaimed.

She sobbed.

"Are you ill?" he said, turning her face so that it lay upon his breast, chin quivering, eyes closed.

No, she was not ill, she said. The white lids lifted. She regarded him sorrowfully. "Only I want to ask you something. I must know," she whispered.

"Ask anything; only don't cry. I can't stand it," kissing her.

"George," she began after a pause.

"Yes, my life," in grave suspense.

"Am I a good wife?"

Good heaven! What a question. Of course

she was, the best and loveliest wife a man ever had.

"But aren't you—have you been disappointed in me?"

"You surpass my happiest dreams of happiness," he assured her hastily. Now was everything all right?

Apparently not. She had gone off into another paroxysm of sobs. He stood with this storm of loveliness clasped to his breast amazed and horrified. What was the matter with Helen? He had left her calm and happy at noon. He found her now in torrential tears. She must be ill.

He lifted her tenderly in his arms, strode down the hall to their room and deposited her on the bed.

"You will always love me, whatever happens?" she insisted, clinging to his hand.

He sat down beside her. He filled his lungs; he expanded himself. He must meet this emergency. "Helen, I could not live without loving you," he exclaimed in a deep and powerful voice.

"But if nothing happens, if nothing ever happens?" she wailed.

He was speechless. When you are caught up without a moment's notice and made to swear to every article of undying love, what else can you

do? But she lay wilted, deadly pale, her eyes fixed upon him dolorously, as if he might be going to slay her with the next word. Therefore—

He did not finish thinking what he was about to think. A sort of shock passed through him, he caught his breath, looked off, the faintest shade of embarrassment in this look addressed to the ceiling, but not painful. On the contrary you might have inferred that this was a pleasurable confusion. He was instantly calmed, no longer disturbed about Helen. He stared at her politely as at an unknown but highly satisfactory phenomenon. He had no experience in a case like this, but he had instincts. Every young husband is a father, at least by anticipation. His impression was that she must be soothed, kept quiet.

He bent and kissed her gravely, as you kiss the Bible when you take an oath. "Don't worry, my sweet; you will come around all right," he told her.

She turned her face away, closed her eyes in tearful despair. He had not answered her question. He had evaded with soft words. This would never do. She was beginning to weep again. He said he would go to the phone and call her mother.

"Don't call mother. She has been here all afternoon," she cried.

So, then Mrs. Adams knew. Well, he didn't care if the whole world knew. "Helen, you must not let go like this. You will hurt yourself," he said with a note of authority.

Her ears heard him; her eyes caught him. For one moment she lay still and sobless. Then she sat up, hair streaming over her shoulders, cheeks reddening. "You too!" she cried. "Oh, you have all had the same thought in your minds. And it isn't so," she informed him.

"Well, if nothing is the matter, what is the matter?" he demanded after a pause in the voice of a man sliding from the top of a climax.

"That is," covering her face with her hands. "Your mother, my mother, you, too, all of you have been expecting something that may never happen. And I did not know, did not realize until this day the meaning of these hints, these questions, this solicitude. It was not for me. I do not deserve it, you understand. I am not that way." Oh! her Heavenly Father, she knew what was before her now if she never had a child. She would not be the same to him!

"Of course you will, you silly darling," he

laughed, gathering her in his arms. "The fact is, I am immensely relieved."

In this wise they took a new lease on their happiness. Helen's skies cleared. It was good to be free and well and just a girl "a while longer," as George put it. Still this was a form of probation. That phrase, "a while longer," was the involuntary admission he made of his ultimate expectations. For his own part, he declared it was much better for him to make some headway in the bank before they could really afford the expensive luxury of having children. Still he felt a bit let down at the contemplation for the first time of the bare possibility of his wife not bearing these children for him.

Thus the first year of their married life ended and the next one began. In the main you can see that every sign for the future was propitious. These two young people had the right mind toward each other; no modern decadence, no desire to sidestep Nature or fail in their duty. Their instincts were normal, their hopes honorable.

How is it then that, with all good intentions, they both missed their cue? It is not for me to say. My task is to tell this story and leave each reader to judge for himself where the blame lay.

No doubt there will be many decisions. I have often wondered if even three judges who passed on the same case without knowing each other's decision, would not each of them render a different judgment. But in regard to this matter, I may be permitted to remark in passing that most of us miss our cue in the business of living, whether we are escorted by the best intentions or a few valorous vices. And my theory is that if we live long enough, we shall hear the Prompter in time to make a good ending. If we do not, there is a considerable stretch of eternity before us where no doubt adjustments may be made with a wider mind.

CHAPTER X

In 1913, Shannon had grown amazingly. The square was now a "plaza," surrounded by handsome brick business houses. There were two or three factories on the outskirts of the town. The little old churches that used to be filled on Sabbath mornings had given place to fine churches with stained-glass windows, which were greatly reduced in membership. What I mean is that the town was prosperous, and had a beam in its eye. Wiggs Street was completely changed and there was some talk of changing the name to "Cutter Avenue." But this was not done. Every man has his enemies. There were many pretentious residences now where cottages formerly stood. Some of them had conservatories. Nobody kept potted plants on the front porch, but some of them had got as far as keeping potted cedars on their stone gate posts and a colored man in rubber boots to scrub the front steps.

George Cutter, no longer known as "young George" since the death of his father, received much credit for the growth and development of the town. It was Mr. Cutter who had induced

certain Eastern capitalists to locate these factories near Shannon. He was more than a prominent citizen at home. He was somebody in New York. He had "influence" in Washington. Otherwise Shannon would never have obtained her hundred-thousand-dollar post office. He carried Shannon County in his pocket, politically speaking, and he kept his congressman in the other pocket, in the same figurative manner.

Five years after he entered the bank, he was occupying the chair and desk on the left side of the door where his father sat when George began his career on the adding machine in the cage. Mr. Cutter, Senior, was still the nominal president, but he had a finer desk and more comfortable, less businesslike chair in the rear of his son. He was now a fat old man, drooling down to a heavy old age. He was merely president from force of habit. He did nothing but watch, with slumberous pride, his son paw the markets, reach out, speculate, risk and win, make a name for himself in the financial world.

But in 1913 all this was ancient history. The young wolf had been just beginning then to get a toothhold. Now he had arrived. He had "interests" in the big corporations. When he became president, after the death of his father, the first

thing he did was to sell this small building to a local trust company and build a finer, larger place for his bank. Here he had an office, off the directors' room in the rear, as magnificent and grave as a sanctuary. And it was so proudly private that there was no spangled glass door leading to it visible to the vulgar public eye. Capitalists and promoters visited him here, but the regular customers of the bank rarely saw him except by accident when he issued from this office, hatted, spatted, coated, carrying a cane hooked over his arm, and stepping briskly across the lobby through the door to where his car stood and shone against the curb. In that case their eyes followed him. And if these eyes belonged to women, of whatever age, they were likely to exclaim, breathe or think, "What a handsome man!"

He was more than handsome, a "presence," almost a perfect imitation of elegance. He was the kind of man who kept his years under foot. He trod them down with so much swiftness and power in this business of getting on that they had not marked him. His face was smooth, his red hair still opulent, his eyes brilliant, masterful. When he came in or went out or passed by, they were always fixed on something straight ahead, as

if you were not there, anxious to catch his glance and have the honor of speaking to him. Probably you wanted to remind him of how well you remembered when he started to work in the old bank. And you were a friend of his father, and had always kept your account in this bank and would continue to do so. But you must be a wheedling, forward old man to get the chance to say such things to him, because your account means nothing to him now, and your good memory only annoys him.

The reason so many men, after they become distinguished or successful, get this habit of looking straight ahead when we are standing ingratiatingly near, wishing to claim acquaintanceship with them in their humbler past, is because they wish to forget this past, and especially you who retain the speaking tongue of it.

George Cutter had outgrown Shannon. Shannon might be proud of him, but it could not be intimate with him. He did not belong there. He was a big town man. You could almost smell Wall Street as he passed you, Williams Street, anyhow, which is only one of the elbows of Wall Street—a notable perfume, I can tell you, of pop-eyed dollars and busy bonds that never rested, but were always being sold again.

Seeing George thus, enhanced by ten additional years, you naturally want to know what changes have taken place in Helen.

Sometimes a slender, fair woman might be seen in Cutter's limousine, waiting at the curb before the bank. But if you saw her, you scarcely noticed her, because there was nothing distinguishing in her appearance. She always sat very still with her hands folded, her lips closed so tightly that they appeared to be primped, and with her eyes wide open, very blue like curtains drawn before windows, concealing every thought and feeling within. When Cutter came through the door of the bank, stepped quickly forward and swung himself into this car with the air of a man who has not a moment to spare, she always drew a trifle closer into her corner of the seat. Then they slid away noiselessly across the square and out Wiggs Street. Even the chauffeur knew that Mr. Cutter never had a moment to spare and invariably exceeded the speed limit.

No word of greeting was exchanged between this husband and wife—not even a look. She did not so much as unpurse her lips to smile. His arrogant silence implied that he was alone in this car. Yet we must know that it was his wish she should come for him, since she so often did

come and wait for him with this look of dutiful patience.

The married relation is not vocative. It tends toward silence and a sort of dreary neutrality, arrived at by years of mutual defeats. It is easier for a man to be agreeable to another woman who is not his wife for the simple reason that he is innocent of this stranger. She knows none of his faults and she has not failed him in anything. And every woman knows that she is instinctively more entertaining to a man who is not her husband, even if she despises this man and truly, patiently loves her husband, because she is under no bond to agree with him nor to avoid his prejudices. There is nothing accusative or immoral in this fact, any more than there is in a momentary change of thought. It is perfectly natural, when you consider how many years they must dwell upon the same common sense of each other.

If the weather was fine, Cutter only stopped long enough to drop Helen at the house. He might tell her he would be late for dinner or he might be late without telling her. Then he was driven at the same spanking, glittering speed to the golf and country club, for a foursome previously arranged.

Cutter had imported the idea of this club. As

Cadmus introduced letters into Greece, so had he brought golf to the business men of Shannon. Until then middle-aged citizens accepted the sedentary habits of their years and went down to their graves corpulent and muscleless, developing only a little miserliness toward the last or a few crapulous vices. But now these men, grown bald and gray, who had never spent a surplus nickel nor taken more exercise than healthy invalids, hired caddies for fifty cents an hour, and spent recklessly for golf sticks and especially golf stockings and breeches. And they were to be seen any afternoon stepping springily over these links, whacking balls—for the ninth hole at least—with all the reared-back, straddle-legged, arm-swinging genuflections of enthusiastic youth. Missionaries have spent twenty years in the heart of Africa without accomplishing so much healthful good for the savages there. But in that case the idea of course is not to prolong the life of a savage, but to save his soul. Still, Cutter was a successful missionary in this matter of golf, because the souls of the men in Shannon had long been sufficiently enured to the gospel to be saved, if they could be.

As for the women, that was a dinerent matter.

Very few people ever worry seriously about the salvation of these milder creatures. Until quite recently they have been so securely preserved, sheltered and possessed that it was actually difficult for a woman to lose her soul by any obvious overt transgression. Even then you could not be sure she had lost it, since she suffered such overwhelming martyrdom for her offense. And we do not know what kind balances may be arranged in the Book of Life for these poor victims of life in the flesh.

There was also a different standard for women in the matter of outdoor exercise, even at so recent a date as this of which I write. They might caper adventuresomely in the open as girls, but the idea of a married woman spreading her feet and swinging her club at a ball on the golf links at Shannon was unthinkable. If they wanted the air, let them go out-of-doors; if they wanted exercise, let them go back indoors and do something.

So Helen never accompanied her husband to the golf links. She always went in the house and did things that would please him, or at least satisfy him when he came home.

They were still living in the house at the end of Wiggs Street. No changes had been made in

it, not a stitch had been added to it. It was simply laundered, so to speak, once in so often with a fresh coat of white paint.

But it was not so sparsely settled within as it had been when she came there as a bride.

Two years after Helen's marriage Mrs. Adams had passed away with no to-do about going at all. She was ill three days, very quietly and comfortably unconscious. Then she had gone to join that highly respectable class of saints in paradise to which no doubt her carpenter husband already belonged. Helen inherited her mother's estate, which consisted of a few thousand dollars' worth of securities in her safety box at the bank, the cottage on Wiggs Street and the contents of this cottage. The cottage was promptly sold and, together with the sale of the securities, furnished George with the money for his first successful speculation.

But Helen would not part with the furniture. She had it brought to her own house. When she had distributed it in the rooms, the hall, all available spaces were filled with it. Her father's portrait, done in crayon, hung above the parlor mantel. Her mother's portrait, also a crayon, hung on the opposite wall. For years to come these two Adams parents were to stare at each

other in a grim silence, as much as to say, "There will be a reckoning in this house some day!" which was due, of course, to the crudely veracious expression the amateur artist always gets with a crayon pencil. For at that time there was nothing but love and happiness and hope in this house. George was really planning then to build a mansion where this house stood. For a while they amused themselves drawing plans for this mansion. Then George became more and more absorbed in his business. He had less time for fanciful conversation with Helen. In any case the subject of the new house was dropped. It had not been mentioned for years.

I suppose if there had been children the new house would have been built. But nothing had "happened." Helen kept a cat, a canary bird and two servants. The cat was a sort of serial cat, exchanged once in so often for a kitten. The bird was the same one. She did not really care for cats, nor much for canaries, but they served the purpose of furnishing some sort of sound and motion in this silent house. She did not want the servants, either. She preferred to do her own work. She would have made an excellent wife for a poor man. She was a marvelously good one to George, who was rapidly becoming a rich man.

She might have been a wonderful caretaker of a great man; she had exactly the right spirit of service and self-effacement. She developed a serene silence which was restful, never irritating. But George was not and never would be a great man. He needed a brilliant woman, and Helen was only a beautiful woman. He needed a charming hostess for his home, with social gifts. And Helen was only an excellent housekeeper. He knew that this house was atrociously furnished, but he did not know how it should be furnished. You may be highly appreciative of music without being a musician. He felt the need of fine, quiet things and neutral tones in his home, but he had neither the time nor the ability to achieve these effects.

Once, indeed, shortly after Helen had rearranged the parlor with the old Adams whatnot and the Adams sofa with a golden-oak spindle back, he had sent out two handsome mahogany armchairs, his idea being to overcome the monotonous color and cheapness of this room. These chairs looked like two bishops at a populist meeting. Helen was pleased, but he had sense enough to know that he had blundered.

I am merely giving you his side of this affair, frankly admitting that she was by nature dis-

qualified to fill the position of wife to such a man. In the last analysis, of course, it would depend upon which of these two people such a man as George Cutter or such a woman and wife as Helen is the worthier type, or the more serviceable to his day and generation. It is not the reaping of what we sow ourselves—sometimes it is the reaping of what the other fellow sowed, the way we bear the burden of that—which determines our quality and courage.

As for Helen, the elder Mrs. Cutter said it all shortly before her death.

One summer evening she lay propped high in bed, her thin knees sticking up, her thin face stingingly vivid, her eyes spiteful with pain and discontent. Helen had just gone home after her daily visit, during which she ministered with exasperating patience to this invalid. Mr. Cutter sat beside his wife's bed concerned for her, anxious to comfort her, but secretly wondering where she would strike. For he perceived by the spitting spark in her eye that she was about to strike.

"Helen is hopeless," she exclaimed.

He was relieved not to be the target. Still he said something in reply about Helen's being a "good girl."

"Yes, and that is all she is. She is not the wife

for George. I knew it from the first," she keyed off irritably.

Mr. Cutter ventured timidly that she had made George a "good wife."

"Good, good, good," she repeated. "I wish somebody could think of some other word for her. But they can't. Good's the adjective she's been known by all her life."

"Well, it is a very good way to be known, my dear," he returned mildly.

"There you go again. Lower my pillow, Mr. Cutter. I can't keep my head up and think about her. She weighs on me like a load of commonest virtues."

He let her gently down. She glared at him. He smoothed her pillow. Would she like a sup of water?

No! and she was not to be diverted, if that was what he was trying to do. "Do you know what a merely good woman can be?" she demanded.

The word good occurred to him again. He wanted to say that there was nothing better than a good woman, but he refrained. He must not irritate Maggie; if only she would not work herself up.

"She can be the least intelligent creature alive, obsessed with the practice of her duties. Her

mind inside her, never in touch with what is bigger and more important outside. She can be the stone around her husband's neck. That is what Helen is."

Mr. Cutter sighed. He was fond of Helen.

"What has she ever done for George? I ask you that." She waited for his answer as if she defied him to name one thing Helen had done to help her husband.

"Well, she's been a good wife to him," he repeated futilely.

"There you go again," she exclaimed. "I've been a good wife to you, too, haven't I?"

"Indeed you have, my dear," he answered gratefully.

"But was I contented with being just that? When we came to this town as poor as church mice and you got the position in the bank, I made up my mind that you should be president of that bank some day, and you are, aren't you?"

"Yes, my dear, and I owe everything to you—"

"Not everything, Mr. Cutter," she interrupted with a sniff; "but I helped you; I made friends for you; I showed off before people to let them know you were prosperous and a coming man. I had some pride."

"You did, my dear. You were game and

looked it," he answered with a watery smile of memory in his eye.

"And I bore a son for you."

"You ought not to blame Helen; you can't—" he began.

"Yes, I can," she interrupted; "if she isn't to have children, if poor George's name is to die with him, she might at least help him enjoy his own career. But she doesn't; she is becalmed. She hasn't got it in her, I tell you, to do what I have done to show my pride and appreciation of the position you have made for us."

"But, Maggie, you are one woman in ten thousand. You have not only been the best of wives, you have been everything to me a man needs."

This reduced her to proud tears, and ended the scene, he holding one hand, she pressing a scented handkerchief to her eyes with the other. She was really quite happy in a sort of fiercely indignant fashion.

I suppose every husband tells his wife some such yarn as this. And he usually gets away with it. He may even believe it for all I know, although there are some millions of other husbands controverting his testimony by the same flattery to their respective wives.

We have biographies of great women, even if they are bad ones. But I doubt if there is a single biography to be found of a merely good woman, because for some reason goodness does not distinguish women, and for another reason, while it may make them useful, dependable and absolutely essential to others, it does not make them sufficiently interesting to hold the reader's attention or the world's attention. You never heard of one being knighted for virtue. It is not done. You never saw a monument raised to just one woman who was invincibly good and faithful in the discharge of her intimate private duties as a wife or a mother. She must do something publicly, like leading a reform or creating a disturbance.

And the only feminine autobiographies I have read were written by women who should not have done so. They have been without exception written by some ignobly good woman, with every mean and detestable use of her virtues at the expense of other people, or they were indecent exposures of moral degeneracy and neurasthenic disorders. Good women cannot write their autobiographies. The poor things are inarticulate. They lack the egocentricity essential for such a

performance. This statement stands, even if the author eventually publishes some such looking-glass of herself.

I would not discourage any woman who is preparing to make of herself a sacrifice wholly acceptable to her husband and family, but it is my honest conviction that it will not pay her in this present world. And that she will wind up like the sundown saint of herself, respected, held in affectionate regard, maybe, but unhonored and unsung. So go ahead with your sacrifice, but do not complain about it. Men, as well as gods, accept sacrifices, but they rarely ever return the compliment.

Helen Cutter belonged to this class. The first years of her marriage passed happily enough. She was not too good. She was often exacting in her pretty, soft, white way. But she always produced this impression of whiteness and simplicity. She was in the confidence of her husband to this extent, she knew how rapidly he was forging ahead in business. She marveled at the swiftness with which he turned over money and doubled it. And she never questioned his methods.

Then the time came when business engrossed him to the exclusion of every other interest. He

was obliged to make frequent trips to money markets in the East and the West. He began to be hurried, preoccupied, irritable.

This is the history of many successful men in the married relation. It usually results in the wife's finding another life of her own, in her children, in social diversions or some other activity. Cutter wished for this solution for his wife. He provided her amply with funds. But it seemed that she did not know how to spend money foolishly. She was invincibly moral about everything. She performed her tea-party duties at regular intervals without any distinction as a hostess, paid a few calls and remained a "home body."

She perceived the change in her husband. He was not now the man she had married. He was no longer even of her class. She could not keep up with him. She knew that she was not even within speaking distance of him, because she could not talk of the things he talked about. Finances, big enterprises, the plays in New York, life in New York. The one bond which might have held them did not exist. She had no children.

CHAPTER XI

A trivial circumstance finally enlightened her as to the length and breadth of the distance between them.

One morning at the breakfast table Cutter looked at his wife appraisingly. They had been married eleven years. She was still pretty, but it was a beauty maturing into a sort of serenity, no vivacity. She had, in fact, a noble look. Stupid women do frequently get it. He had long since made up his mind that Helen was, to say the least of it, mentally prismatic. She had no elasticity of charm. Still he resolved to risk her.

"Helen, Shippen gets in from New York this afternoon. I want to bring him out here for dinner. Do you think you can manage it?" he asked.

"The dinner? Why, yes, of course, George," she replied, having no doubt about being able to manage a dinner. This Mr. Shippen could not possibly be more exacting than George was himself.

"He is coming down to look at that pyrites mine I want to sell. We are going to get into this war, and the Government is bound to need pyrites. Shippen is tremendously rich, something of a sport, I imagine. He was rather nice to me when I was in New York last month, introduced me to a lot of men I need to know," he explained. "So you must help me out by doing your best," he added significantly.

"I will, dear," she assured him, still unperturbed.

This serene confidence disturbed him. He doubted if she could put across the simplest meal in a correct manner. During the lifetime of his mother, his father had entertained such out-of-town guests; but these excellent parents had been dead for years. He was obliged to fall back on Helen.

"You must do your best and look your best. You are lovely, you know."

"Am I?" she asked, not coquettishly, but as if this was an opportunity to assure herself about something which was causing her anxiety.

"Yes, of course, you are," he returned in a matter-of-fact tone. This was no time to get personal with his wife. He wanted her to do something and do it well.

"Wear that gown I bought you from Madame Lily's," he suggested.

"Oh! must I?" she exclaimed as if she asked, Would it be as bad as that?

"The very thing, and wear the necklace."

She said she would, but what she thought was that if she must dress like this she could not stay in the kitchen and help Maria with the dinner, and Maria was not to be trusted. She was "heavy handed" when it came to salt, for example. Her chief concern was for the dinner, not herself. She always missed her cue.

Nevertheless, Shippen had the shock of his swift life when he was presented to Mrs. Cutter that evening.

The weather was very cold. A bright fire burned in the grate. A chandelier of four lights overhead left scarcely a shadow in this cheap little parlor. Everything in it glared. The white walls stared you out of countenance. The golden-oak piano turned a broadside of yellow brilliance across the flowered rug. The whatnot showed off. The spindle-back sofa fairly twinkled varnish. Inanimate things can sometimes produce the impression of tittering excitement. The furniture in this pop-eyed room seemed to be expecting company. Only the two mahogany armchairs on

either side of the fireplace preserved their gravity and indifference, as if they had been born and bred to be sat in by the best people.

Shippen saw all this at a glance; at least he felt it without knowing what ailed him. Later he was to quail in a sort of artistic anguish beneath the cold, calm, crayon gaze of that excellent carpenter, the late Sam Adams, whose portrait still hung above the mantel. And he was to feel the colder, grimmer crayon eyes of the late Mrs. Mary Adams piercing him between the shoulder blades from the opposite wall. But that which riveted his attention this first moment when he entered the room with Cutter was Mrs. Cutter.

She stood on the rug before the fire, a slim figure, but not tall. She was wearing a cloth gown of the palest rose lavender, the bodice cut low, fitting close to her white shoulders, lace on it somewhere like a mist, a wildly disheveled bow of twisted black velvet that seemed to strike at him, it was so vivid by contrast with all this gem paleness of color. A necklace of opals, very small and bound together by the thinnest thread of gold, with a pendant lay upon her breast. Her pale blond hair was dressed simply, bound about her head like piety, not a crown. No color in her skin, only the soft pink lips, sweetened somehow

by that pointed flute in the upper lip, long sweeping brows, darker than her hair, spread like slender wings above the wide open blue eyes, seeing all things gravely, neither asking nor giving confidences.

"This is Mr. Shippen, Helen. My wife, Shippen," George finished cheerfully.

He had made a hasty survey of Helen. She would do, he decided, if only she would go, move off, say the right thing.

Helen offered her hand. She was glad to meet Mr. Shippen.

He bowed over this hand, very glad, and so forth and so on.

She said something about the weather; he did not notice what she said nor what he answered; something about the same weather of course. But whatever he said had not released him from her gaze. She kept him covered. Cutter had joined in with his feelings and opinion on the weather. What was said made no difference. Shippen had to keep his eyes down or running along the floor, not on Mrs. Cutter. Men do that when they are startled or ill at ease with a woman, if they are uncertain about where to place her in the category of her sex. Shippen was very uncertain on this point. He had seen many a woman better

gowned, more beautiful, but never had he seen one with this winged look.

"Are we late?" Cutter asked, addressing his wife.

"No," she answered briefly, as if words were an item with her.

"Well, anyhow we are hungry," he laughed. "Took Shippen out for a little winter golf. Links rotten after all this rain. No game. All we got was an appetite."

Shippen glanced at Cutter. For the first time he recognized Cutter. Smart fellow, pipping his village shell. But, good heaven, this room! Might have got further than this in his scenery.

He went on catching impressions. He felt very keen. It occurred to him suddenly that Cutter's wife was responsible for the room. This fellow who could fly like a kite in the markets couldn't fly here or move or change anything. Odd situation. If this was her taste in house furnishing, who chose her frock for her? She was dressed like a fashionable woman, and she looked like a madonna; not virginal, but awfully still like the image of something immortally removed. She gave him a queer feeling. Still it was distinctly a sensation; he handed it to her for that.

All this time Cutter was talking like a man

covering some kind of breach, laughing at the end of every sentence. He heard himself making replies, also laughing. Nothing from Mrs. Cutter. He looked across at her seated in the other mahogany chair, and dropped his eyes. Her gaze was still fixed on him, no shadow of a smile on her face. He understood why instantly. This was not mirth, this was laughter he and Cutter were executing as people do when they make conversation. He was amazed at this woman's independence. She had nothing to say and said it in silence. She heard nothing amusing, therefore she was not smiling. She was not even embarrassed.

It all depends upon your experience and angle of vision what you see in another person. This is why your husband may discover that some other woman understands him better than you do. She knows him better than you do because she knows more about men than you do. And if there is anything that weakens the moral knees of a man quicker even than strong drink, it is to feel the soothing flattery of being better understood by another woman.

Precisely in this way Shippen understood Helen, and knew perfectly that Cutter was not the man who could do it. She was invincible, he

saw that; stupid, he saw that. And he was enough of a connoisseur in this matter to realize that intelligence would sully this lovely thing. Merriment would be a facial transgression. She was that rare and most mysterious of all creatures, a simply good woman without the self-consciousness they usually feel in their virtues.

He kept on with these reflections during dinner, which was served presently. He had no idea what kind of dinner it was. He was assembling plans for a speculation. He had been successful in many lines besides those involving money.

"You come to New York occasionally, don't you, Mrs. Cutter?" he asked, endeavoring to engage her in conversation.

"Not that often. I have been there only once," she told him with a faint smile. She had referred to her wedding journey without naming it. At that time she and George had spent a week in New York.

"You liked it, of course?" Shippen went on.

"It is like a book with too many pages, too many illustrations, too many quotations, isn't it?" she evaded.

Shippen threw back his handsome black head and laughed.

Cutter shot a bright glance at his wife and

joined in this applause. He had no idea she could think anything as good as that to say. And she could not have done so if he had asked the question.

"What I mean is that one must live there a long time before he could know whether he liked it or not," she explained.

"Well, I think you would," he answered, meaning some flattery which she did not get.

Having said so much, she had nothing else to say. The two men went on with this discussion of New York life. Cutter was determined to let Shippen know that he was no stranger to it —old stuff, such as brokers and buyers get, under the impression that they are bounding up the social ladder of the great metropolis. Shippen heard him give quite frankly his café experiences, not omitting soubrettes. No harm in what he was telling, of course, but as a rule men didn't do it at home.

Once or twice he glanced at Mrs. Cutter, ready to come to heel, change the subject if he saw the faintest shade of annoyance on her face. There was no shade there at all, only a calm, clear look. And this look was fixed on him as if he were a page she read out of the book of this city. Apparently she was indifferent to what Cutter was

saying. He decided that she was not jealous of her husband.

He wondered if Cutter had the least conception of the kind of woman his wife was. He thought not. Some day she would stand immovable in the way of his ambitions, he decided. In that case what would Cutter do? This was—well, it might prove very interesting. He went on speculating personally along this line.

The reason why so many men try to climb Mount Everest is because they cannot do it. Let even one reach the summit, and that exalted peak has fallen into the hands of the tame geographers and scientists. It becomes a business then, not an adventure, to chart those terrific altitudes. For the same reason the most attractive woman to men is the unattainable woman. Shippen found Mrs. Cutter attractive. He did not analyze the reason why. It was not her beauty. He had had success with far more beautiful women. He doubted his success here. Heavens! To find a woman who could not be won! What an adventure. That steady, unrevealing gaze in her blue eyes—what did it conceal? What did she know? He doubted if she knew anything. That was it; she was something real, not built up out of little knowledges, little virtues, spiced with little vices,

and finished like her furniture with the varnish of feminine charms. What a noble change from the skittish kittens and the secret viragoes and the mercenary starlings he had known.

It is astonishing what terrible things a man can be thinking, while he looks at you frankly and laughs honestly and takes your food like a brother. Certainly Cutter would have been astonished if he had known what was passing through the mind of his guest as they talked and laughed together at this table. But it is a question if Helen would have been moved. She did not know this man, but she felt him like a darkness, in no way personal to her, but there, with George frisking around like an ambitious spark in this blackness. She was thinking of George chiefly, interpreting him according to Shippen. It was a fearful experience, and no one suspected her pain, because a woman can dig her own grave and step down into it behind the look and the smile and the duty she gives you, and it may be years before you discover that she is gone.

All this is put in for the emotional reader who knows it is the truth, and has probably felt the sod above herself, even while she is sadly dressing beautifully for an evening's pleasure with a husband who has slain her or a lover whose per-

fidy has brought on these private obsequies. But all such truth is unhealthy, like the failure of courage in invalids. And in this particular I warn you that the fate of Helen differs from your own. She died a few times, as the most valorous women do; but she had a sublime instinct for surviving these incidental passings.

Shortly after dinner Cutter took Shippen back to his hotel. They had some affairs to discuss further before he should leave on the early morning train. Cutter explained to Helen, because this was unusual. It was his invariable habit to spend his evenings at home. He was a good husband, according to the strictest law of the scribes and Pharisees, so to speak. What I mean is that he was literally faithful to his wife, though you may have suspected to the contrary. This is not the author's fault, but due to the evil culturing of your own mind. A man may be faithful to his wife, and at the same time frisk through the night life of a place like New York. He may be doing nothing worse than taking a whiff and an eyeful of the naughty world, getting something to talk about to the other fellows when he comes home. It is silly, but not wicked, as you are inclined to believe. I do not know why it is that so many respectable women are disposed to suspect the

worst where men are concerned; but it is a fact which even their pastors will not deny.

When Cutter came in that night Helen had retired. He turned on the light. "Asleep, my dear?" he asked.

"No," she replied in that tone a woman has when her voice sounds like the nice, small voice of your conscience.

He came and sat down on the side of the bed, regarded her cheerfully, like the messenger of good tidings. She lay very flat, hands folded across her breast, face in repose, no expression, eyes wide open, a state of self-consciousness bordering onto unconsciousness which women sometimes sink into as a sort of last ditch.

Cutter was so elated about something he did not observe that his wife was dying momentarily. He wanted to talk. He had something to tell her. "You were splendid to-night, Helen," he began.

She revived sufficiently to ask him if the dinner was "all right."

"Dinner!" he exclaimed. "I scarcely noticed what we had to eat. You took the shine off the dinner. You were stunning. Means a lot to a man for his wife to—make good; sets him up. Shippen was impressed, I can tell you that."

Shippen! She did not speak the name, but her glance, slowly turned on him, meant it.

"How did you like him?" he wanted to know.

"I did not like him," she answered distinctly.

He stared at her. Her respiration was the same; her eyes coldly impersonal. He sprang to his feet, kicked off his shoes, flung off his clothes, snapped off the light and retired to the bitter frost of that bed. He lay flat, clinched his hands across his breast and worked his toes as if these toes were the claws of a particularly savage beast. His chest rose and fell like bellows. His red brown eyes snapped in the dark.

Helen was the antidote for success, he reflected furiously. She was the medicine he had to take, a depressant that kept him down when he might have been up. Just let him get the wind in his sails, and she reefed him every time. He had been patient, leaving her to have her own way when it was not his way. Hadn't he lived in his own house with those blamed Adams pictures glaring at him for nine years? Yet he had endured them for Helen's sake. And the druggets, and the very cast-off teacups of Helen's family.

Right now he was lying in old Mrs. Adams' bed and had done so for nine years, when he much preferred his own bed. He had tried to bring

Helen out, and she would not be moved. He had tried to dress her according to her station in life, and she would not be dressed. He had humored her in everything. But now when he had an opportunity, a big chance which he could not take without her, she planted her feet as usual. She obstructed him at every turn. She didn't like Shippen. That showed which way the wind would blow when he told her. And he had to tell her. He could not move hand or foot without her. But, by heaven! if she didn't come across this time—

"George," came a voice from the adjacent pillow.

"Umph!" he answered, startled out of finishing that threat he was about to think.

"You asked me, or I should not have told you what I think of Mr. Shippen. But since you want to know—"

"I don't want to know. I am trying to get a little sleep. I'm tired," he interrupted.

"But since you ask," she went on, "I think he is horrible. He reminds me of the powers and principalities of darkness. He made my flesh creep—"

"For the love of peace, Helen, stop. You know absolutely nothing about him."

"Yes, I do."

"What?"

"I know that he is wicked."

"How do you know?"

"I feel it."

He snorted and turned over. He slept that night with his back to this slanderer, who did not sleep at all.

CHAPTER XII

The next day George Cutter's spirits had revived and with them a certain hope. He resolved to have it out with Helen. She was not reasonable. Few women were, but he knew that she loved him. He might count on that.

In the evening after dinner they sat before the fire in the parlor. Helen wore a dark dress, plain, durable, unbecoming. He considered this dress, the woman in it, with a coolly impartial eye. His heart failed him. He doubted if she could pull it off if she would. If, for example, she could be made to realize the importance of dressing handsomely and extravagantly every day. If she could be induced to live the life she would have to live. He admitted it was a sort of puppet existence. But as necessary to his success as the dummies in a shop window are to advertise the owner's trade. Ten thousand women did it all the time, liked it. Still Helen was not one of them. She was removed by nature, every instinct, from that class. He was half a mind to give up the whole thing. At this moment, Helen

looked across at him. There was a hint of tears in her eyes, a fugitive smile on her lips as if this smile pleaded with him for a certain forgiveness.

He laughed. He stood up and took her in his arms.

"Am I all right now, George?" she asked, as if she had been shriven by this embrace.

"Absolutely," he assured her.

They sat down. Helen sighed, being now full of that sad peace which makes sighs.

"The trouble with you is, dear, that you are never wrong. That cuts you out of life. We who are in the thick of it must be a little wrong," he explained.

"I suppose so," she agreed.

"Not so rigid. We can't be," he said.

She agreed to that also.

"If you could be a little less perfect, it would help me a lot."

She smiled, implying that in that case she was in a position to help him. But what could she do? She had often felt how little service she was.

Her meekness intrigued him. "How would you like to live in New York?" he asked.

"I would not like it," she answered after a pause.

He might have known what her answer would

be, Cutter reflected bitterly. His face reddened. His anger was rising.

"Why? Do you want to live there?" she asked, feeling this silence directed against her.

"Oh, it makes no difference what I want, because if we lived on separate planets you could not differ more widely than you do from my way of life and my desires, my very needs," he exclaimed.

This was unjust, she knew. Still she felt guilty.

"George, I can't pretend that I should like to live in New York, but if you want to go there, I will go. I must not stand ever in the way of your success."

He sat in brooding, bitter silence, staring into the fire.

"We might live very quietly; at least I could, couldn't I?" she asked timidly, ready to make every other concession.

"No; you could not. You'd have to play the game as other women do. You would not do that. You—your whole mind is against the idea—you would not adjust yourself. You would not even try to adjust yourself to the world as it is. You want to make one yourself, six hundred feet long and seven hundred feet wide with this house

in the middle of it. You have done it. Look at it," he exclaimed, with a glance that swept this room like a conflagration.

This was the first time she had suspected that the parlor was not furnished according to his liking. She was that simple, and he had been that patient.

"You have created a place to live in where nobody can live except as you do," he went on.

He took no notice of the fact that she sat with one hand on her breast, staring at him with a look of mortal pain.

"Well, I will be more considerate of you than you can be of me, Helen," he began again. "We will drop the idea of going to New York. You like this place. I might be contented here myself, if I had nothing to do except keep it. But I have my business, a man's name and reputation to make. I will stay here when my affairs don't require me to be somewhere else. You understand," giving her an eye thrust.

"Yes," she answered, meeting this thrust steadily. She was dying to her happiness, not without reproach, but without fear.

He crossed his legs and swung his foot after this deed. He did not tell her that Shippen had offered him a partnership in a big business the

night before. In view of her unreasonable prejudice against Shippen, this information would only have furnished her with stronger objections to his plans.

The point was that she had failed him as a helpmate in the career he had chosen. He purposed to alter his course accordingly. He would do the square thing by her. She was his wife. He had that affection for her; but she should not block his way. He meant to get on with her or —without her. Other men did. He knew successful men in New York, whose wives spent half their time in Europe or somewhere else. He supposed he might do better than that. The bank in Shannon would require a good deal of his time. He would come home occasionally. He must spend a few days out of every month there.

This was the end. Helen sensed it. She saw his side of the situation. She had failed her husband. She had been obliged to do so. He had never expressed the least regret because she had not borne children, but she knew that if they had had children, this would have made all the difference. She supposed she herself might have been a different sort of woman if she could have been a mother. Her influence as a wife had never reached beyond the door of their home. Now she

had failed him at this upward turn in his career.

She had been a good wife to him according to the Scriptures, but he needed another kind of wife, one who could fill a public position, a wife according to the world. She grasped this fact clearly, held it before her, regarded it with remarkable intelligence during a strictly private interview she had with herself on this subject some time the next day. She wondered how many wives combined the two offices which George required of her. If you were the social official of his home, if you "played the game," as he called it, how could you be—well, the kind of wife she had been to George?

She thought of Shippen in connection with this reflection. She could not have told why, but she did. She was not so stupid as not to suspect that Shippen had something to do with this sudden desire that George had to live in New York. "Playing the game" meant coming in constant contact with men like Shippen, women like the women they had discussed that night at dinner—Shippen and soubrettes; somebody's wife they had seen in a café with a man who was not her husband and whom they had discussed with a curious sort of grinning admiration, as if this lady was a lady to be reckoned with.

Helen was wrong, of course, in the picture she drew of the game the worldly wife must play. But there was this much sanity in her point of view: Such a wife cannot always choose her partner nor the card she must play. It is a skin game, matrimonially speaking, and sometimes the one skinned is the husband, more frequently it is the wife, even if it is only the gossips who do the skinning.

Helen made her way through such reflections as these, not as I have written them down in words, but as one walking through the dark in a dangerous place, with cautious steps and outstretched hands, feeling the edges of strange abysses with her feet, touching unknown things that might be alive with reptilian life.

The private mental life of all women, good or bad, is usually morbid, consisting of thoughts or speculations which bring an emotional crisis and leave them in fears and tears more frequently than we can believe, judging by the faces they show.

Helen passed at this time through some such crisis. She was not changed by it, because women of that sort are the "amens" of their sex. But she was confirmed. She remembered what George had said long ago about this belief in the freedom of love. She had often recalled it, always with

a pang of terror. If she had ever been jealous of him, it was in this indefinite way. Now the way that led to such love seemed to widen before her eyes.

She was alone in her room, sitting on the side of her bed during this scene with herself. You know by your own experience, if you are a married woman, that you always sit on the side of your bed when you are dramatizing the sadder prospects of going on doing your duty by this husband—or of not doing it. You chose the bed instead of a chair because of a potential sense of prostration. You prepare yourself to fall back in a storm of tears or to sink upon your knees in prayer for strength to bear this "cross." The more modern woman is said frequently to rise unshriven, stride majestically across the room and stare at her own proudly rebellious reflection in the mirror.

Helen did none of these things. She simply sat there, dry-eyed, unprayerful, not rebellious, reviewing the future. This can be done with amazing vividness, because the future is always a repetition and development of the past. Then she made a resolution. It was that later secret marriage vow a wife sometimes takes after she is acquainted with the deflation and vicissitudes of this

relation. Whatever happened, she would be a good and dutiful wife to George. She would be patient. Nothing should move her to reproach him. Thus she abandoned her rights and self-respect. I do not say that she ought to have done this; I doubt it; but the fact remains that many women do it. And in the end they frequently become sanctuaries for disgracefully defeated husbands. But to say so is not to recommend the practice. My task is to show how it worked out in this instance. And you are warned therefore that a sanctuary may become a very fine edifice, even smacking a little of worldly grandeur.

CHAPTER XIII

The little pale image of goodness so frequently seen sitting in Cutter's car before the bank waiting for him around five o'clock in the afternoon was what remained of the original Helen two years after he had relinquished his plan to live in New York.

Keeping an entirely good resolution may be strengthening to character, but it is fearfully damaging to feminine beauty. For one thing such women lose the sense of clothes. Helen had known how to dress in the happy, wild-rose period of her youth; but how can you keep up the flaunting, flowing sweetness of your draperies when you are no longer a girl to be won, but have become a wife who has been reduced to her duties and her virtues?

Still, things had not been as bad for her as she had expected they would be. George was away from home now much of the time. He had interests in New York and spent at least a part of every month there. But she heard from him regularly, usually a wire, sometimes a brief note. When he was at home, it was the same old rou-

tine, except that he spent more time at the golf and country club.

The truth was that Helen got on his nerves frightfully with her silence and dutifulness and patience. The impeccable wife is a difficult proposition, if you tackle it. Cutter instinctively avoided the issue. He accepted Helen for this awfully "better" woman than he had bargained for. There was none of that human "worse" in her, so amply provided for in the marriage ceremony, with which to vary the monotony of their life together. Often he wished for a stormy scene, such as by nature married people are entitled to have. If he was irritable, she left him alone. If he was calm, she would come and sit and sew a fine seam in a sweet silence that was perfectly maddening. If he flung the paper he was reading on the floor, slammed his feet down and groaned, she would look up at him, then drop her eyes once more to this seam—or she would rise and leave the room noiselessly.

Good heavens! He could not stand it, meaning "her." Why didn't she complain that he neglected her? Why didn't she say something, show some spirit? Why didn't she appeal to his conscience? That was what a wife was for—one thing, at least. If she would only show some

fight, he might regain control of himself; as it was, he was slipping. Why couldn't she see that and stop him? He really wanted to slow up; but how was a man to do it with his wife letting him go like this?

Cutter was the kind of man who would eventually account for his transgression by saying if he had married another sort of woman he might have been a better man. In that case, you may be sure, if his wife had married a totally different kind of man, she would have been a happier woman.

Meanwhile Helen was prepared for the worst. This is a terrific preparation, but sometimes the only one a woman can make; and it leaves her in a singularly placid state of mind. If she had understood the situation, she might have behaved differently. But she did not understand Cutter.

The woman who knows only one man never knows much about him. To understand a husband, you must do a lot of collateral reading of mankind. He is all of them, from the best to the worst. You are not so apt then to be mystified by his various manifestations. And if you have any sense of the proper courage of your sex, you will act according to his symptoms, not your own sanity, even if it is to burst into tears

and cry: "Undone! Undone! Oh, my God!"

He will fall for it and react every time; because God, upon whom you have just called, no doubt having your emergencies in view, has created men so that almost without exception they have no defense against a weeping woman.

At the same time it is the worst possible governing principle not to vary your tears with laughter, tyranny and some sort of lovely unreasonableness. Men cannot endure a perfectly logical and sane woman. She is too much like a petticoated edition of themselves. They want action. You must keep your ball rolling, you must convince your husband of your mental inferiority and of your tender superiority.

Helen, poor girl, was not that much smarter than her husband. She was straight. She lacked the dearer deviousness of her sex, and, within her limits, was utterly all to the good. Whether a state of unmitigated morality is profitable is a thing I have always wanted to know. And in the course of a long life, the only answer I have ever been able to find is that any state bordering on immorality, or unmoralness, is sure to prove unprofitable. The difference between these two equations offered the only light at the time on Helen's future.

CHAPTER XIV

In April of 1917 this country joined the Allies in the Great War. The nation was transfigured with that spiritual and sacrificial emotion which invariably follows the sending of vast armies of men to be slain. The profits on patriotism were enormous for those who knew how to do business at the expense of the people. Cutter was one of these eminently sane profiteers. He had doubled his fortune during the first few months. He remained in New York most of the time. He had been away from home the whole of July.

One morning early in August he arrived at the door of his own house in Shannon. Helen had not expected him. She was flustered. Breakfast had been served, but she would have another breakfast prepared at once.

No, George explained briefly, he had had something on the train; she was not to trouble herself on his account.

This consideration was unusual. Well, he must go in and lie down; she knew he must be worn out, Helen suggested.

No, he was not tired; and no, he would not go in and lie down.

He behaved like a visitor in the house. But he remained at home all day, puttering about the house and garden with a curious gentle air. After lunch he took a nap on the sofa in the parlor. To Helen's question as to whether he would go out for some golf as usual, he had replied that he would not play golf and that she might have an early dinner. Afterwards she remembered a faint embarrassment in his manner during the whole of this day, as if it were an effort to talk or reveal the simplest word of himself. But at the time Helen was pleased without questioning why he was behaving in this vaguely domestic fashion.

Late in the afternoon she had followed him into the garden, seated herself on a bench there with her hands folded—merely present, you understand. Cutter continued to pace slowly back and forth along the walk. Helen observed him gently. She thought he looked spent. She was glad he was taking the day off; this was all she thought about that.

Now and again Cutter regarded his wife with a sort of remorseful tenderness. He was experiencing one of those futile reactions a bad man has toward ineffable goodness when he knows he is

about to be rid of the burden and reproach of it. Presently he came and sat down beside her in the sweet, unaccusing silence she always made for him.

Her skin was still very fair, her hair darker, with golden lights, her brows much darker, the same blue eyes, white lidded. Strange he had never noticed before that the clothes she wore were like her—this grave little frock she was wearing now, white, sheer, like a veil, long pretty sleeves, a kind little waist with darts in it to fit her figure. Who but Helen would ever think of taking up darts in her bodice this year when every other woman was fluffing herself? He smiled at this, but the humor of his face was neither intimate nor affectionate. It was a sort of grinning footnote to Helen's character.

He began presently to feel the old irritation at her silence. He halted, dropped down on the bench beside her, but at the other end, hung himself by one elbow over the back of it, crossed his legs and addressed her with a question which he frequently used like a key to turn in the lock of his wife's silence.

"Helen, if you were about to say anything, what would you say?" he asked.

"I was just thinking," she answered, implying

that she preferred not to publish these thoughts in speech.

But he wanted to know. His manner was that of a husband who wanted to start something.

"If we had children," she began, looking at him, then away from him, "I was wondering what they would be doing now."

His eyes widened over her, but she did not feel this amazement. Her own gaze appeared to be trailing these children among the flowers in this garden.

"I often think of them," she went on. "Our son—I always expected the first one to be a son—he should be quite a lad now. What do boys of fourteen do at this hour of the day?" regarding him with a sort of dreaming seriousness.

He made no reply. He had slumped; with lowered lids he was staring at the graveled walk in front of this bench.

"But the two little girls, much younger, would be here in the garden with us. Isn't it strange, I always know what they would be doing, but not the boy. I have seen them in my heart like bright images in a mirror; I have heard them laugh many a time."

He was appalled. Never before had he known

Helen to talk like this. Why was she doing it? Did she knew what was in his mind? Was she deliberately torturing him?

"Everything would have been so different if they had lived," she went on, as if she had actually lost these children, "your life and mine. They would have changed us, our ways and our hopes. We should have built the house we planned—for them," turning to him with a dim smile.

"I suppose so," he said, obliged to answer this look; "but you know I have never regretted that we have no children."

"At first you wanted them," she reminded him.

"But not now. It is better as it is," he returned moodily.

"No; not for me; not for either of us," she sighed.

For the first time in her life she saw tears in his eyes.

"For them?" she asked putting out her hand to him.

"No, for you," he answered, drawing back from this hand.

She noticed that. Her attitude toward him was one of submission. She did not ask herself

now why he shrank from her touch. She knew nothing about the psychology of passion, its strange and merciless revulsions.

"A son or a daughter would be company for you now," he said after a pause.

"Yes; it's been dull, not having them with me now. One grows so quiet inside. It must be a little like dying, to be getting older and stiller all the time."

He could not bear this. He had a vision of what had happened to her. And now it was too late; she was predestined, even as he was doomed to his fate. . . . What follies love imposed upon youth! He had loved her and taken her, when she belonged to another kind of man, when he might have been happy with another kind of woman. Now he no longer loved her, and the other woman might give him pleasure, but never peace or happiness. . . . He supposed, after all, there must be something moral about happiness. Well, then, why had he missed happiness with Helen? Heaven knew she was made of every virtue. And he had kept his vows to her. He had not actually broken faith with her—yet.

He rose and walked to the other end of the garden. He stood with his back to Helen, still thinking fiercely, like a man trying with his mind

to break the bonds that held him. . . . What a horror that this woman should be his wife. Nothing could change that. She was not of his kind. She was different; that was the whole trouble. If she were not his wife she would be the sort of woman he would never notice or meet. In view of everything—the vision of life and society, and what was coming to a man of his quality—he regarded it as remarkable that he had been so long faithful to her. It was stupid, silly, bucolic—the kind of husband he had been to this kind of wife!

He turned. Helen was still seated on the bench. The sight of her filled him with irritation, a sort of peevish remorse. He was going to have the deuce of a time getting through his next encounter with her. He meant to put it off to the last minute. Meanwhile he simply must get to himself, away from her. If she hung about he felt that he might lose control of himself. And he must be careful not to say anything which he might regret afterwards.

He came back, stepping briskly along the walk, passed her as he would have passed a carpenter's wife on the street and went on toward the house.

Helen's eyes had met him far down the walk. They followed him until he disappeared around the corner of the house. Then, as if she had re-

ceived some dreadful warning from within, she pressed her hand to her breast, her lips unfolded, her cheeks blanched, her eyes widened as if she beheld the very face of fear.

What was this? George was not like himself. She was aware of some frightful change in him. There was a flare about him, something feverish, disheveled in his apparent neatness. She began to think over this day, his unexpected return that morning. Now that she came to think of it, there was no train upon which he could have arrived at that hour. His reserve, it was a fortification. She realized that now.

She sprang up, started for the house. Something had happened, something horrible. What was it? She must see George. She must touch him, speak to him.

She found him seated on the veranda with the afternoon paper spread before him, held up so that she could see only the top of his head, not his face. She stood struggling with herself. She wished to run to him, fling herself upon his breast and cry out: "George, what has happened? Do you love me? I am your wife. Kiss me."

Never had she felt like this, the nameless terror, the beating of her heart like hammers in her breast. And all in this maddening moment, she

realized that she dared not approach him. He did not feel like a husband, but like a stranger who did not belong in this house.

She stood leaning against the spindle-legged pillar of the veranda and waited. She did not know for what, but as if she expected a blow. And she wanted it to fall. She wished to be put out of this pain as soon as possible.

Cutter laid aside his paper, stood up, swept a glance this way and that as if he could not decide which way to retreat, then he went inside, and affected to be looking for a book on the shelves in the parlor. He heard Helen pass down the hall, knew that she had halted a moment in the doorway. He felt as if he was being trailed. What he wished was that she would have dinner, so that he could get through with this business. It must be done after dinner, because he could not sit down to the table with her afterward.

She came back presently to fetch him to this meal. She wanted to cling on his arm, as she used to do years ago. But he evaded her, she could not have told how, only that if he had shouted to her not to touch him, she would not have been surer of what he meant.

They accomplished this dinner together. Cutter keeping his eyes withdrawn from her, taking

his food with that sort of foreign correctness which a man never practices at his own table. Many times they had passed through a meal in silence, but not a silence like this, potential, strained. Once Cutter caught sight of Helen's hand, which was trembling. But he spared himself the sight of her face.

She scanned his, marked the new lines in it, the sullen droop to his eyes, usually so frank. She recalled the fact that he had not gone into their bedroom during this day; that he had kept to the public places in this house, as if it were no longer his house; that he had answered all her questions briefly; that in the garden he had drawn back from the touch of her hand; that now he was hurrying secretly to finish dining. She had premonitions of some unimaginable disaster which intimately concerned herself, but she could not bear to think what it was. By a forlorn faith many a woman receives strength to remain stupidly blind to her fate. Helen had some sort of faith that, if she kept perfectly quiet, this horror, whatever it was, would pass without being revealed to her. Then suddenly her courage broke.

Cutter thrust back his chair, rose from the table and made for the door.

She followed him. "George," she cried, "what is it? I am frightened"; the last word keyed to a wail.

They were standing where she had overtaken him in the hall. He took out his watch, stared at it. "Twenty minutes past seven. The express is due at eight," he muttered with the air of a man who times himself, leaving not a minute to spare.

"Yes, the express is due then, but—" she began.

"I am leaving on that train for New York," he said, addressing her point-blank.

"But, George, this is only one day for me; and you have been away five weeks," she exclaimed.

"Helen, come in here. I have something to tell you, and very few minutes to spare," standing aside that she might precede him into the parlor.

She went in, sat in one of the mahogany chairs and regarded him with that long, winged look. The suppressed harshness of his voice had steadied her. She was calm. Women can withdraw to some quiet corner, sit perfectly still and watch you condemn yourself without a tremor, although the moment before they may have been distracted by every fear. I have sometimes thought it might be a form of spiritual catalepsy. In any case, it is a very fortunate seizure.

"I am returning to New York to-night," Cutter informed her, still standing as if this departure was imminent. "I shall make my home there in the future."

"Without me?" she asked, as if it was merely information she wanted.

"Without you," he repeated, nodding his head for emphasis.

"For how long?"

"I have resigned as president of the bank here, disposed of all my interests. It is not my intention ever to come back to Shannon." He did not look around to see how she had received this blow. He waited; silence, no movement, not a sound. "You can get a divorce. It will be easy," he suggested.

"No," she answered.

"I inferred that you would not now. Later, you may decide differently."

She said "No," and she did not repeat it.

"Meanwhile, I have provided for you. The house, the car, everything here is yours. The deeds are made to you. And I have placed securities to the amount of exactly half my estate in the bank here. They are in your name. You will have an income of something more than ten thousand a year. It is not much; but more, I

think, than you will care to spend." He thrust two fingers into his waistcoat pocket and drew forth a slender key. "This is the key to your safety deposit box," dropping it on the table. "You will need only to clip the coupons and cash them," he explained.

She had not moved, but as she listened her face changed to scarlet. Her eyes sparkled and were dry.

There was another moment's silence. Cutter picked up his hat, fumbled it. He had not expected much of a scene, since Helen was so little given to emotional scenery. But neither had he been able to predict this indictment in fearful silence.

"You have been a good wife, Helen. I have not one reproach. But things cannot go on as they have gone. My life and my opportunities lie in a broader field. I have sacrificed them too long already. You have not been happy here as my wife; but you would be miserable in New York as my wife. I am doing the wisest—in the long run the kindest—thing for both of us, giving you your liberty and taking mine."

Since she would not answer he went on nervously.

"I have told no one of—our plans. I leave

that to you also. The one thing I must have is the right to achieve my own life in my own way. I give you the same privilege and—"

"You have only ten minutes before the train is due," she interrupted.

PART THREE

PART THREE

CHAPTER XV

Sometimes when a man has been shot, he stands for the briefest moment before he falls. So Cutter stood, still facing the window, while the fatal shock passed through him. This was Helen who had spoken, who had reminded him of the time when his train left, but not his wife. He flirted his head around and snatched a glance at her.

She was sitting very erect, not touching the back of her chair. The little frills on her dress stuck up stiffly, like the petals of a very fine white flower. Her cheeks were scarlet above this whiteness; but there were no tears. Her chin was lifted; her lips closed; her eyes covering him like a frost on a cold clear night, one of those still nights when the whole of Nature's business is to freeze. He turned, took a step toward her, and did not dare take the next step.

You may think you are making the best of a bad situation by ending it. You may persuade yourself that you are doing the square thing,

praise yourself for behaving better than the average man does in a similar predicament. Then suddenly something happens, a word falls upon your ear, or you see yourself revealed in the eye of your victim as a rogue, a common fellow who has lost his standing.

Cutter had some such sensation as this, confused but devastating. He was determined to be free, to be no longer bound to this woman who ceased to appeal to him and who did not belong to the world he had won by success. But how was this? She had turned the tables on him. She was not only taking him at his word; she was dismissing him.

I do not say that it is a queer thing about a man of this quality, but it is one of the abortive characteristics of every man of this quality, that he has a dog-in-the-manger instinct always toward the wife he discards. He expects her to remain cravenly faithful to him, to love and cherish him tearfully and patiently while he takes a whiff around, because, heaven bless us, isn't that the nature of good and chaste women? It was. And yet here was Helen, instantly assuming the autonomous attitude of a free state. She was making no effort to hold him or save him.

Hang it all, a man never could understand a

woman! Here he was standing before his discarded wife, having done the best he could for her, divided his fortune with her, released her from her normal duties to him, while he might have kept this property and lived as he pleased. And in spite of all this, he was made to feel strangely humiliated, worthless and unspeakable to her. This was what her look and manner meant. Good heaven, he could not slink off defeated like this! He had meant to go with his head up, not diminished. The sting of that would interfere with his pleasure, and he had made expensive plans for a gratifying existence in New York.

"What I want, Helen," he began after this tumultuous pause, speaking in the husband tone of voice, "is a sensible understanding, not a breach. I have provided for you as my wife should be provided for. If you should ever need my help or protection—"

"You have barely time to make your train," she interrupted, glancing at the clock and keeping her eye now on this clock. Her voice was not that of a wife, but of a lady, speaking probably to some agent whom she was determined to get out of the house before he sold her something she did not want and could not use.

"Oh, very well, if you won't be reasonable!" he exclaimed as he strode flashily past her.

But when he reached the door he halted, looked back at her like an actor being put out of the scene and required by his lines to pause, show indecision, the fangs of his outraged emotions to the appreciative audience. But there was no audience to witness Cutter's histrionic exit; only this neat, cool, little star of a lady with flaming cheeks, whose eyes remained resolutely upon the face of the clock.

This man, who a while ago could not bear the touch of his wife's hand, experienced a momentary revulsion toward his own future, to all it offered. He wanted to go back, take Helen in his arms, kiss her, feel the cleanness and sweetness of her goodness and nearness to him. But this was only momentary. He remembered the dullness of the years. He must buck up, he told himself hastily; just let him get through, escape this last tug of the old life and he would be a free man. Beneath this shrewd calculation of himself, there was a faint premonition that he had better not go back in there to perform these last sacred rites of parting with his wife. He was afraid of her, as criminals fear law.

He went out, closing the front door softly be-

hind him. He walked hurriedly toward the station, disturbed and shamed by the thoughts his very steps seemed to toss up in his mind. For months, while his affair in New York was progressing lightly but surely toward this crisis, he had dreaded this scene with Helen. He had felt for her, the distress and anguish she must suffer at the idea of losing him. He had always been as sure as that of her deep devotion. Now it appeared that he had lost Helen. He realized suddenly that he had counted on her. Whatever he became, back here in that quiet house Helen would always be his wife. She was not the woman to think of a divorce.

Well, he had been a fool not to have understood all along that Helen would be true to herself as usual, to her own convictions, whatever they were. And he was no longer one of these convictions. Life was a mess, anyhow. If a man failed, he had poverty pawing at his door. If he succeeded, made a fortune, his nature, his tastes and desires all changed. If only Helen had gone out and made a name or a fortune, achieved something in the world, he supposed she would be different too. Maybe she would have understood—

The whistle of a locomotive in the distance

ended these speculations. He stepped from the pavement and swung with long strides down the railroad track to where the sleeping cars would stop. A moment later there was a rattle of the rails, a roar and a grinding of brakes. The self-bereaved husband climbed aboard, walked magnificently up the aisle of the car to his section, sat down, rumbled a command to the porter and heaved a sigh.

He was immensely relieved. The worst of it was over. He had suffered some, but he was feeling very fit now, animated. He was done with the past. He was headed for New York, the city that whetted a man's senses and ambitions. He had worked hard. The world owed him something for that. No place like New York for collecting what the world owed a fellow, and so on and so forth.

The other passengers in the coach stared at him. People always did. Impressive looking man, must be somebody, they decided. No one would have dared drop his bag in that section and sit down opposite such an oppressively prosperous looking person, not even if he had a ticket for the "upper." He would have glanced at his ticket, at Cutter; then he would have gone on to the "smoker" and arranged with the porter to

let him know when he might climb into his berth, which, of course, would be after the great man had gone to bed in the lower one.

This is the professional pose of the recent-rich man. Every one who rides in sleepers and parlor cars is familiar with the type. Sometimes a shoe drummer can put it on to perfection; but as a rule it is a fellow like Cutter, whose character and tastes and manners have been developed by the shock of wealth, a diseased man morally who receives more involuntary respect than any really distinguished man could bear.

A man in mental, moral or financial distress will frequently pace the floor all night. But women never do, because the forms of grief and anxiety to which they are subject weaken them physically so that they immediately take to their beds in anticipation of this prostration. Therefore I hold that it is a circumstance worth mentioning that Helen did not retire that night. She remained seated as he had left her until she heard the express go by. Then she went through the house turning out the lights.

Maria, she observed by the seam of light under the kitchen door, was still in there. If all her faculties had not been concentrated on something else, she might have wondered why Maria was

later than usual in clearing up after dinner. She passed back up the hall without so much as a look at her bed through the open door of her room, and sat down again in the same chair in the parlor, as you go back to the place where you left off in a book or to a train of thought when you have been interrupted.

There could never be real darkness in Shannon any more, because the city had "water and electric lights" now. Still the room was nearly dark, with only a faint reflection of the street light far below through the window. Helen sat like the ghost of herself in this dimness and silence. She was not thinking nor feeling. She had literally been drugged by the horror of this last hour. She was numb—past all pain. Presently she must return to consciousness; but she instinctively prolonged this trance. Sometimes she changed her position in her chair, but never once did she languish or cover her face with her hands or address her Father in heaven.

Here was a woman on her mettle at last, asking no odds of heaven. So long as you have a husband, it is natural to remain in prayerful communication with Providence for help and guidance, but when your husband has abandoned you

there is no such tearful feminine reason for engaging the assistance of the Almighty. You may do it later; but for the moment you feel quite alone in the universe.

CHAPTER XVI

Sometime after midnight Helen stirred herself, much as if she was awaking early in the morning with a busy day before her. She stood up, stared about her in the shadowy room, moved to the windows and pulled down all the shades. Then she turned on the lights. She stood directly beneath the chandelier, lifted her hand to her head, unpinned her hair, skewed it up tightly and pinned it like a harsh duty on the back of her head. It was perfectly evident that she had made up her mind to do something, and to do it thoroughly. She had a sort of merciless house-cleaning expression.

She glanced around the room, reached for two Cutter photographs on the mantel, removed a recent excellent likeness of her husband from a frame on the piano and left the room, carrying these things in her hand and the frames under her arm. She paused long enough in the back hall to lay the frames on the bottom step of the attic stairs. Then she went out on the back porch and dropped the photographs down the cellar steps.

She walked briskly back to her own room. For

the next hour she went through the house—drawers, closets and trunks—like the fine-toothed-comb of femininity, her cheeks scarlet, her lips primped purposefully, her eyes wide and busy, like the condemning eyes of a censor who is determined to leave nothing that should be cut out, removed and destroyed. From time to time she issued forth, her arms laden with somebody's worldly goods, obviously a man's things, to toss them down the cellar stairs and return for more. Finally she came out with a shaving brush, the cord of a bathrobe and an old four-in-hand tie, evidently the last gleanings.

She descended the stairs, clearing the steps as she went of shirts, collars, trousers, dress suits, overcoats, hats, brushes, shoes, slippers, pajamas, even buttons. She worked hurriedly, cramming this mass of clothing into the hot air furnace. She struck a match to these things, watched the flame creep greedily along the sleeve of a fine white shirt and lick the broadcloth back of a Tuxedo coat. Then she closed the door, went back upstairs, took a glance around, to make sure that everything was in its usual order, withdrew at last to her own room, undressed, let down her hair, braided it, turned out the light and went to bed.

She could hear the furnace roaring below. She hoped all that inflammable stuff would not set the roof on fire. That is to say, she did not want to attract attention by the burning of her house. Otherwise she was indifferent about what might happen. If only she might escape notice for a while, until she could adjust herself to this horror! In spite of the closed registers, a strong odor of burning wool filled the house. She got up and raised the windows. She hoped the scent would be gone before Maria and Buck came in the morning. Then she rested, as one does after accomplishing something that must be done, no matter how unhappy one is.

At seven o'clock she heard stirrings in the kitchen as usual, but no voices. This was not as usual, because there was always the subdued rumble of conversation between these two servants early in the morning. But she did not notice it. She rang for Maria and informed her that she would take her breakfast in bed. She had never done this before; still Maria showed no signs of surprise. She rolled her eyes and sniffed the air of this house, which did not smell pure and undefiled. She was in such a state of suppressed excitement that she could barely wait to get back to the kitchen to whisper the news

to Buck, who was just coming up the stairs from the basement where he had been to interview the furnace. Servants are the scavengers of all domesticity, especially of wrecked domesticity.

For the next three days Helen remained in bed. She was not ill; but she was not able to face life on her feet. When your whole existence has been absorbed by the life of another person—his will, his desires and his habits have determined your every act—it is not so easy to have freedom and the pursuit of your own happiness suddenly thrust upon you. It is necessary to acquire new motives and new interests.

Besides, Helen was obliged to face the humiliation of her abandonment. So, as I have said, she remained in bed, very quiet, very pale, very submissive to Maria's ministrations. When she was alone, she lay for hours scarcely moving, strangely abstracted. No doubt we come somewhat after this fashion always into the next existence. One thing was certain: The burden of her thoughts was not her recreant husband, else there would have been tears, anguish, fever and presently the doctor in attendance.

A great grief may be a great exaltation. Helen had this high look when Maria brought her breakfast tray in on the fourth morning. She was not

merry; she had nothing to say; but she had arrived somewhere in her mind. It was obvious even to Maria that her mistress was about to do something. She wanted to know what day of the month this was, as a person who has been deliriously ill always asks about the time of day when he recovers consciousness.

Maria told her that this was the fifth.

"Of what month?" was the astonishing next question.

"August, Miss Helen."

"Oh, yes, of course," she returned, apparently gratified that this was still August. "Tell Buck to bring the car around at ten o'clock," she said.

"She's come out of her swoon, Buck, and wants you to have the car ready at ten," was the news Maria carried back to the kitchen.

"Whar is we gwine?" he asked.

"I dunno. But ef I knows Miss Helen like I thinks I does, they ain't gwine to be no grass growin' under your feet no time soon."

She was polishing Mrs. Cutter's pumps during this conversation. Now she started back with them. She was about to lay her hand upon the knob of Helen's door when she stiffened, turned her head to one side and listened. The sound of a voice issued through this door, one voice,

Helen's. She was alone in there with her God, but it was obvious to Maria that this was not any woman's praying voice. Neither were the astounding words she heard suitable for prayer.

The fat old negress bent, laid her ear against the keyhole, rolled her eyes and listened. Then, as if she could not bear the amazement of what she heard, she flew back to the kitchen, caught hold of the astonished Buck and moaned: "Oh, my Lord; oh, my Lord! And her a white 'oman!"

"What's de matter wid you, gal?" he demanded, shaking himself from her grasp and staring at her.

She refused to tell him. She implied that such information as she had might cost them both their innocent lives, if she should repeat it.

"You don't know nothin', and you ain't heard nothin'," he retorted, going out, pausing at the door long enough to point at the pumps which she still held in her hand. "You better take dem shoes to Miss Helen, er she'll be tellin' you somethin'," he warned her.

Shortly after ten o'clock Mrs. George William Cutter appeared at the Shannon National Bank. She wanted to look at some papers in her safety deposit box, she told the cashier.

She remained a long time closeted with this

box. When she came out she carried a sheaf of coupons in her hand; and she was very pale, not gratified as a woman should look under these circumstances. Beneath the coupons there was a check, drawn on a New York bank for ten thousand dollars and signed by her husband. This check lay on top when she opened the box; attached to it was a note stating with studied brevity that this sum, including interest, was the amount she inherited from her mother's estate, which he "herewith returned." It began, "Dear Helen," and was signed, "George," with no softening, affectionate prefix.

It was this note, not the clipping of her coupons, that had detained Helen so long in the little dark anteroom of the vault. There was no date, but from the date on the check, she perceived that it had been made on the tenth of July, when George had been in Shannon for a week. As early as that, then, he had contemplated this separation! He was planning this spurious honesty, paying back the money she had advanced him years ago for his first adventure in stocks while he cheated her of his love and her dignity as a wife. When you think about this, it is always some relatively insignificant thing that excites your most lasting contempt. So, now Cutter fell

to the nadir of his wife's regard. She was obliged to remain in this little closet of the vault after she had finished everything, endeavoring to compose herself before she dared meet the scrutiny of the eyes outside. We do this so often when really no one takes particular notice of us.

It was the merest accident that Arnold, the new president, was coming in and caught sight of her as she was leaving the wicket after depositing the check and the amount of the coupons to her account.

He greeted her effusively. "You are looking well," he informed her.

She knew that she was not, but she told him, yes, she was very well.

"And how's Cutter?" smiling as a man does when he thinks he has introduced an agreeable topic.

She said that she had not heard from Mr. Cutter since he returned to New York.

"Busy man! Busy man! Goes at everything like a house afire. You will have to take care of him, Mrs. Cutter, or he'll break down, go smash one of these days."

She made no reply, merely swept her glance over Arnold's shoulder toward the door.

"We were sorry to lose him as president of

this bank. His resignation came as a complete surprise. And now I suppose we shall be losing you. You will join him in New York, of course."

"No," she answered steadily. She had resolved to tell no lies and to make no explanations.

"Keep your home here then! Well, that's good news. Means Cutter's anchored in Shannon, after all. He'll be dropping in on us here at the bank when he comes down; be mighty glad to see him."

She said she did not know, bade him good morning and went out.

Arnold stood watching her through the window until she stepped into the car. Then he turned to the cashier. "Nice woman, Mrs. Cutter, but —well, she's not vivacious, is she?" he said, grinning.

"I have often wondered how a man like Cutter came to choose such a wife," the cashier returned with a slower grin.

"Wasn't a man like Cutter is now when he courted her. Young fellow; I remember him well; had a fine physical sense of himself. Nobody suspected he would ever develop the money-making talents of a wolf in the market then. Fell in love with a pretty girl. She was the prettiest

thing in Shannon. Married her. That's how it happened," Arnold explained.

"Seems to have turned out all right."

"Never heard anything to the contrary; but you can't tell. Something is in the wind. I thought Mrs. Cutter looked pretty shaky this morning. Had a sort of dying gasp in her eye. Pale, noncommittal. Couldn't get a darn thing out of her about Cutter. But she may be trained that way. Wives of great men often remind us that what's husband's business is none of our business," he laughed. "Cutter's a sort of cheap great man. How much did she deposit?" lowering his voice.

"Fifteen thousand."

"Open account?"

The cashier nodded.

Arnold whistled.

"Show's Cutter trusts her, anyhow."

"Shows she's not being guided by her husband's advice, or she'd never keep that much money idle," Arnold retorted.

As things turned out, however, this was the busiest money in Shannon that autumn. It was spent with amazing swiftness at a time when the war extravagance of our government had already set the pace for reckless spending.

A situation frequently develops under our very eyes, and we have no suspicion of it. The fact is, most situations that develop into sensations begin this way. Then we discover that what has happened had been "going on" a long time. Otherwise, I ask you how should we obtain those breathless sensations with which the press and society nourish our groggy minds? It is the unexpected that stirs and animates our greedy, popeyed interest in life, especially the other fellow's life.

I will not go so far as to say that Helen acted from design, for she was the least devious or designing woman I ever knew; but she must have counted on the probability that some time must elapse before the breach between Cutter and herself could be suspected in Shannon. His absence would not be significant, because his business interests in New York had kept him away from home most of the time for a year. The war, the violent emotions and the terrific demands it imposed had unsettled all life.

People who never left home arose and flew this way and that, like flocks of distracted birds. Old maids with dutiful domestic records, suddenly laid aside their darning gourds and church work and sailed for France, went into canteens

and became the honorable mothers of whole regiments. Young girls did likewise, and earned for themselves distinctions that will become a heritage to womankind, all mordant-tongued gossips to the contrary notwithstanding. In Shannon the women worked like bees. If you paid your Red Cross assessments, turned in sweaters and wash rags for the soldiers in France, no further notice was taken of you. Because all womanly interests and affections were centered on these boys in France.

Helen made her contributions to these enterprises, bought a few bonds and disappeared before the middle of October. The inference was that she had joined her husband in New York. The *Shannon Sentinel* so stated in a brief local on no better authority than that the editor had seen her board the express one evening. Passengers bound for New York always took this train. And where else could Mrs. Cutter be going when every finger of your imagination pointed to New York and her husband as her logical and legitimate destination?

This long-legged logical faculty, directed by imagination, is responsible for much that is fictitious in current gossip and even in written records; witness, for example, that master work of fiction,

Mr. H. G. Wells' "Outline of History." It is logical, convincing, and much of it is based upon the most entrancing interpretation of rocks, fossils and bones—which does not prove anything except that the sciences of geology, anthropology and the rest of them are bright-eyed sciences, full of delightfully imaginary conclusions. While it may all be the truth, we do not know that it is true, and Mr. Wells cannot prove that it is. Meanwhile, if we could exercise as much faith and imagination toward God and the future as he has shown in revealing the Paleozoic and previous periods in the past, somebody would be born presently fledged with wings and a skyward mind.

But, all that aside, what I set out to tell was that Helen did not go to New York and that she did not return to Shannon until the beginning of the following year.

Shortly after her departure, a tall, dark young man with high black hair, who carried his head bare, apparently out of deference to or pride in this hair, descended from the morning train at Shannon. He was accompanied by an ordinary looking man, apparently of the higher artisan class. The two of them entered a taxi and disappeared out Wiggs Street.

No notice would ever have been taken of them,

if they had not been seen at a distance, standing in front of the Cutter residence, staring at it, gesticulating, evidently engaged in fervid conversation, moving from one side of the lawn to the other to stare again, talk and swing up high gestures at this little, low, white setting hen of a house, as if it was of the uttermost importance to do something about it.

Mrs. Flitch watched these two strangers until she reached a certain conclusion. Then she went to the telephone and called Mrs. Shaw. She asked her if she had heard that the Cutter home was to be sold.

Mrs. Shaw replied that she had not; but that she knew Mrs. Cutter had stored all her furniture and things in the barn before she left.

Mrs. Flitch said, well, that settled it. They were evidently about to sell the place. Some men were out there looking at it now. No, strangers. She had seen them pass just after the morning train from Atlanta came in. Real-estate men, probably. She said she knew all the time that the place would be sold. The wonder to her was that Helen had stayed out there so long, with her husband practically living in New York. And so on and so forth until they reached the usual discussion of Red Cross supplies.

A few days later the ordinary man of the artisan type returned to Shannon with a roll of blue print under his arm. The next thing Shannon knew the roof was off the Cutter house and there was a corps of workmen out there, spreading wings to it, putting on another story and setting up magnificent columns in front to support the coronet-countenance of this house. And from the awful rumpus going on within, it was evident that partitions were being torn out and elegant changes being made.

There was no Creel to censor news in Shannon. Rumors started and turned back, or rumors died during a Liberty Loan drive. Finally, it was settled that the Cutters had not sold their place, but that they were spending a fortune rebuilding it. They were not obliged to count the costs, even during these strenuous times when the price of labor and materials were beyond the reach of most people. They had plenty of money and no children. Still, a display of wealth at such a time was certainly in bad taste. Had anybody heard a word from Helen since she went to New York? This query went the rounds of the Red Cross room late in November. No one had heard from Helen. Mrs. Arnold said that her husband had received one or two letters from Mr. Cutter

on matters of business. She understood that Mr. Cutter had some kind of government contract and was making a great deal of money.

Mrs. Flitch tossed her little gray head, snapped her black eyes and said she supposed the Cutters would come back now and then, with their maids and butlers and valets and fancy dogs, and quarantine themselves in this fine house and refer to the people of Shannon as the "natives." If they did, it would make no difference to her. She had known the Cutters since George Cutter's father and mother came to Shannon and lived in a three-room house, and Maggie Cutter did her own work. And she lived next door to the Adamses for twenty years. Helen was nobody but the daughter of Sam Adams who was a carpenter, and she never would be anything else to her.

Mrs. Shaw said if it had been her house she would not have painted it colonial yellow. But she admitted the tall white columns "set it off."

Mrs. Arnold said she and Mr. Arnold had strolled out there on the last bank holiday. They had gone through the house, because they expected to build and wanted "ideas." The rooms were large now, lofty ceilinged; and the walls were beautiful. She had been especially im-

pressed with the big room added on the west side. "It is different from the others which are done in a misty gray with the woodwork finished in old ivory. They are elegant and sober. But this one is not sober, very bright."

"Probably the ball room," Mrs. Flitch suggested.

Mrs. Arnold glanced up from the bandage, she was rolling. "No," she said, "I am sure it is not a ball room, because it opens into the one Mrs. Cutter has reserved for herself, they told me. The decorations—are unusual. I was surprised."

This was as far as she got. She had a neat little mind and only gossiped like a perfect lady, which is a very fine art. Still, she thought it interesting, if not sensational in a pleasant way, that this room had a decoration of Mother Goose pictures around the top of it—all the literature of infancy illustrated there, in fact, from this wandering goose mounting a highly ornamental staircase to the lurid cow with exalted tail in the act of jumping over the moon. And she was glad Mrs. Cutter had "this" to look forward to after so many years. A woman without children was to be pitied.

Then Helen Cutter came home late in January, quite unobtrusively and alone. No maid, no

wig-tailed man servant, no fancy dog. Evidently Mr. Cutter was still in New York.

But rich people continually did queer things that other people could not afford to do. From that point of view everything looked all right. Their wives went about the world alone, and their husbands frequently did business in some other part of the world. No one in Shannon suspected that the relations between Helen and her husband were even strained. They merely heard that she had "come down" to superintend the furnishing of her new house, that she had engaged an interior decorator for this purpose, that a great many fine things had been shipped in, and that she was having some of the best pieces of her golden oak done over for her own room. These pieces were painted gray and delicately ornamented with tiny wreaths of flowers. As it turned out, however, most of this old stuff was used to furnish that large, bright and sprightly room with the Mother Goose wall paper.

As usual, Helen saw little of her neighbors. The weather was bad; her house was topsy-turvy; she was very busy; and she had an established reputation for reserve. Still, they met her here and there on the street, in the shops, in passing. And once shortly after her return she had paid

a brief visit to the Red Cross rooms to deliver her quota of sweaters. She would have remained longer: she craved the comradeship of these women whom she had known all her life, but the consciousness of her humiliation, yet unknown to them, affected her courage.

Sometimes the woman who has fallen secretly avoids her friends and acquaintances, because she knows that to keep up relations is a form of cheating, for which she will be the more severely punished when her deflection is known. I suppose Helen, who had every virtue, felt the impending mortification of her situation, when it became known in Shannon that her husband had deserted her.

She came in, wearing a plain, long coat with a fine fur collar and a close-fitting fur hat. She was received cordially and a place was made for her at the long table where the bandages were being rolled. She sat on the edge of her chair, as if she must be going presently. She was not smiling. She appeared years younger, and there was a lost look in her blue eyes which no one noticed.

She took off her coat, in response to Mrs. Shaw's invitation; but she had only a moment to stay, slipping off this garment and revealing her

figure slender as a pencil in a blue frock of some smooth stuff smartly buttoned to her chin.

"We are glad to see you back here, Helen," Mrs. Shaw said.

Helen said "Thank you" for the simple reason that she could not pretend to be glad of anything. A mania for veracity makes you inelastic, uncouth and ungraceful socially.

Mrs. Flitch asked her when she was expecting "George." It was a shot in the dark, and she did not mean it. But she was a woman whose very instinct could aim accurately at your vulnerable point.

"I am not expecting Mr. Cutter at all," Helen replied.

Mrs. Flitch had to take this answer, which was too frank to excite suspicion. But she did want to know if Helen expected to make her home in New York. "I suppose you will only come here now and then," she suggested, looking over the top of her glasses at her victim.

"I shall never live in New York. My home is here," Helen answered, with the air of a person who would do this, but would not discuss her plans.

She was one of those human "short circuits" who drops the periods in conversations and com-

pels you to start another sentence on another topic. These women went back to the perpetual discussions that raged at that time in every Red Cross working room, about the specifications for wounded soldiers' dressing gowns. Mrs. So-and-So's work had been returned, because she had put too many pockets—or not enough pockets—on the gowns she had made.

Mrs. Flitch had suffered the outrage of having two sweaters returned because she had finished them around the bottom with a fancy rib stitch. "As if that made any difference. There is too much red tape in these Red Cross regulations," she exclaimed. "They obstruct us more in the work than the wire entanglements in France obstruct the advance of the German Army."

This was not true, but it was so aptly put that a murmur of sympathetic comment followed while needles flew and threads snapped.

Mrs. Flitch was so fluffed up by this involuntary vote of confidence in her rib stitch and her point of view that she turned to Helen and asked her if she did not "think so too."

Helen answered no, she did not think so, because then everybody would follow their own fancies in the making of these supplies, and there would be no system.

Mrs. Flitch's needle flickered like a tiny spear as she hoisted it with a jerk, bent over and bit off her thread as if this thread was the head of an enemy.

Another "short circuit"! Another fuse of conversation burned out! Tongues flew like babbling wings to cover the breach. Mrs. Flitch sat drawn up and reared back, cheeks reddening as if a wasp had stung her in the face.

Helen was like a tactless person who contributes an adverse opinion upon stepmothers in a company where several eminently respectable ladies have married widowers with children. She felt the sparks about her, but she was not dismayed. She did not care how Mrs. Flitch felt. She had reached that invulnerable stage of indifference arrived at only through great suffering or moral abandonment. In either case, it is always a state of mental courage.

Mrs. Arnold was chairman of the Red Cross Chapter in Shannon. She sat at the head of the work table during these snapped-off conversations, discreetly silent. She was pursuing her own train of thought. Helen stood up presently to put on her coat. She regarded this supple, wisp-waisted woman with secret amazement. For she was the only one there who had seen the nursery decora-

tions in that new west wing room of the Cutter residence. Her mind worked like the nose of a rabbit at Helen, as the latter took her departure.

The consensus of opinion after she went out was that she had "changed," with Mrs. Flitch in the minority. She said she could not see any difference. "She's only changed her ugly gray coat and blue hat for a good-looking coat and fur hat." This was all that was said about her. Gossip, if you remember, was much neglected during this period. We indulged in it briefly and went back to the transfiguring sensations of our martial emotions.

CHAPTER XVII

And Helen went home, let herself into her fine house, took off her things and sat down before the library fire.

She really had imported a maid, an ex-modiste of mature years, who would be of service to her in the choosing of her clothes and dressing herself properly. She could hear this woman now moving about in the next room getting out her things. She was practicing dressing for the evening, because now she had a purpose and a future in view which some years hence might involve toilettes and magnificence.

It certainly does change a woman to lose her husband. It buries her or brings her out. I suppose if Helen's husband had been properly and providentially parted from her by death, she might have retired sorrowfully into her widow's state and effaced herself or devoted herself quite differently to good works. But the passing of George Cutter left no such sanctities to dignify her. On the contrary she had been abandoned on account of her virtues and stupid devotion to

home. She was like Job. She held on to her integrity and was sustained, as he was, by her conceit.

But unlike Job, who suffered considerable financial losses during this period, she had come into a considerable estate. She had been paid off by this deflecting husband. Money will sustain your pride and courage as an outraged woman when mere faith in God may leave you exalted in the ditch of every worldly misfortune. Helen had remained the proper resurrection period flat on her back in bed, not from histrionic design; but she was actually able to rise on the third day. My belief is that everything in the Scriptures is true, if you adjust yourself to the way it is true. Thus, if you will not waste your vital forces in emotional dissipations of grief when overtaken by sorrow or humiliation, if you are really willing to live again normally, three days down will usually put you on your feet with sufficient courage and strength for the performance. It is no use to send for the doctor. In cases of this kind a physician is a sort of psychic drug you take, which requires a repetition of his soothing presence. Thrice fortunate are they who dare to discover that the wings of adversity are the strongest wings upward in human affairs.

Helen, penguin bred, had acquired this serene flying power. She had been absolved from a depressing devotion to an ignoble man. She came out of her travail informed with pride, the cold fury which good women, scorned, feel, and with a determination to have what she had always wanted and could not have as a wife.

She leaned back in her chair before the library fire, clasped her hands over her head and looked anticipatingly at the ceiling, a queer expression on this formerly merely dutiful woman's face, like a song in her eyes, like faith that smooths the brow, like a hope that lifted and sweetened the corners of her mouth; there were no shadows of fear to dim this gentle effulgence of eyes, lips and brow.

To be loved does make a woman happy, but it never endows her with her own peace, only protection. There is a difference, if you know how to read it, between love and hope in her face. The former is conferred and may be taken away: the latter is an act of faith and cannot be dimmed or destroyed. Helen had this look of "anticipation," as some physicians call it, a mark which Nature confers upon women like a meek distinction.

Helen finally went to her room to practice her

evening toilette. At five o'clock she was dressed and standing before the mirror studying this cream-colored frock of crêpe, that clung to her figure like long folded wings. It was not "trimmed." She insisted upon a certain primness, as good women do who have no sense of style.

Some women live and die so virginal that they never know why other women wear a rose, or display the sparkle of a jewel upon their breast. If they put on these invitations to love it is merely copying the universal feminine custom. They do not know how to mean the rose or catch the sparkle of the jewel in their manner.

Helen wore no invitations. She was simply anxious to look the mistress of this establishment, never to be mistaken for a dutiful servant. The horror she had felt of this impending fate since shortly after her marriage, when she knew that she was not to have children, and the long sentence she had actually served in this capacity rankled.

A bell rang somewhere in the house. She paid no attention, since she had no visitors and the front door bell never rang except when something was delivered.

A moment later there was a tap on her door

and the maid entered. "Some one to see you, Mrs. Cutter," she announced.

"Who is she?"

"A man."

"Not Read?" referring to one of the workmen.

"No, Mrs. Cutter; this is a gentleman. I left him in the parlor."

Helen frowned.

"He is somebody. I am sure of that. And he said that you knew him," the woman explained.

"That I knew him? Then he—why, it must be Mr. Arnold," Helen said. Arnold was the only man in Shannon who might have any reason for calling on her.

The woman hesitated, gave her mistress a fluttering glance as if some sort of gibbering, peeping thought had suddenly popped up in her mind. "This is not Mr. Arnold," she said. "I think he is a stranger. Shall I tell him you are not at home?"

"I will see him; but hereafter, Charlotte, I am not at home to any one who does not give his name."

"Yes, Mrs. Cutter," Charlotte answered meekly, closing the door behind her. Then she glanced again at the crumpled bill she held in

her hand, thrust it into her pocket, wrinkled her nose, sniffed and discreetly disappeared.

Helen stood for a moment with her back to the mirror, as we all do sometimes when we cannot bear to read in our own faces the fear we have in our hearts. Since that night six months ago, when Cutter had left her, she had received no word from him. She had sternly repressed every thought of him. But never for a day had she been free from the vague fear that he might return. She no longer loved him; she despised him. Yet the old habit of submission—if he should return, how could she find the courage to send him away, if he asserted his claim upon her as his wife? She must do it. Her plans were made for a different life altogether. But suppose now, when she was on the point of realizing her dearest hope, this man waiting for her in the parlor should be her husband?

She came slowly into the hall and advanced toward the open door of the parlor. Reproaches, words inconceivable to her until this moment, trembled upon her lips. This was her house; she had built it for her own peace and happiness. She would not share it, not for the space of a breath, with a man so depraved that he could betray his own wife, abandon her—and so on and

so forth as she advanced, halted, and finally came steadily up the long hall, pale with fury, eyes blazing blue flames, convinced by her own fears that this man was Cutter. She was ready to deal with him according to the natural vocabulary of an outraged woman.

For the gentlest woman, wronged, may suddenly change into a virago after you have made sure that she will endure anything. But if she ever breaks, it is like any other form of hysteria, incurable. She will be subject to verbal frenzies upon the slightest provocation so long as she lives.

For one instant Helen stood upon the threshold of her parlor, speechless with amazement. Shaded lights cast a soft glow from above over the room, where the faintest outline of castles showed between shadowy trees in the wall paper. And tufted, spindle-legged chairs, covered with blue-and-golden brocades, flashed like spots of sunlight in the pale gray gloom.

The visitor was undoubtedly enjoying these effects. He sat, the elegant figure of a man, on the sofa beyond the circle of light cast from the reading lamp behind him. His knees were crossed. He was working one foot musingly after the manner of a man pleased with his reflections.

And he was smiling—not a smile you could possibly understand, unless you are familiar with the outlaw mind of certain rich men. But, in case you are scandalously psychic, you might have inferred that he was smiling at these dim castles in Helen's wall paper as a prospective tourist in the romantic lands, where passing rivers sing to these castles and where scenes, centuries old, are laid for lovers.

He was so much absorbed in whatever he was trailing with his thoughts that he had not seen Helen when she appeared in the doorway, but almost at once some sense warned him of her presence.

His startled glance caught her. He was on his feet at once. "Oh, Mrs. Cutter! This is indeed good of you. I was afraid you would not see me," he exclaimed, hurrying to meet her.

"Mr. Shippen!" she gasped, with no marks of pleasure in the look she gave him. It was strictly interrogative, unfeelingly so.

"Yes," he returned hastily, interpreting her manner. "I came down to look after the sale of that mining property. Couldn't resist dropping in on my way back to town this afternoon. Wanted to see you."

She moved past him, sat down some distance

beyond and fixed her wide blue gaze upon him.

He followed, not quite sure about sitting, feeling somehow that she might be going to keep him on his feet. Still he risked it and chose a chair politely removed from her immediate neighborhood, which was chilly, he could not tell whether or not from design.

"You wish to see me?" she asked after a pause.

The question disconcerted him. He flushed, recovered himself and showed his teeth in a handsome smile. "Yes, do you mind?" he retorted.

"But what do you want to see me about?" she insisted, as if this must be a matter of business, a painful business, since she knew that he was associated with her husband.

He snickered nervously, recovered his gravity at once, warned by the tightening of her lips. "When are you coming to New York?" he asked suddenly.

She drew back from this adder of a question. "Is this why you came—you were sent?" she barely breathed the words, laying a hand like a confession upon her breast.

"I was not sent," he returned quickly. "You understand?"

She signified that she did with a nod of her head. She released him for one moment from

her steady gaze; then she fixed her eyes on him again with the same interrogative suspense, as much as to say, "Well, then, if you were not sent, why are you here?" She could not sense a meaning that would have been plain to another woman.

It was the stupidity of goodness, he decided, and was charmed by a certain experimental fear of her. He must proceed cautiously. That was the delightful part of it, to be obliged to watch his step in an affair of this kind. He had no doubt of his ultimate success—a married woman, abandoned by her husband. He knew all about that by inference from Cutter. Cutter was too brazen in the conducting of his "bachelor" apartments not to feel perfectly safe.

He supposed there had been some sort of financial adjustment between him and his wife. He knew very well that the situation in New York would not last. Cutter was simply the profitable investment a certain beautiful and brilliant woman had chosen, who had the record of a sentimental rocket among the sporting financiers of the East. The first time he came a cropper in the markets, she would abandon him with the swiftness and insolence that would make the fel-

low's head swim. Then Cutter would return to his wife. They always did.

Sometimes he had regretted not having a wife laid by himself as a sort of permanent stake, domestically speaking. If only he did not feel such revulsion toward the candor and monotonous details of actual married life. His decadent delicacy would be offended by the squalor of licensed intimacy with a woman. "Squalor" was the word he invariably used in discussing the psychology of marriage.

Still, he might marry Helen Cutter. She would never be in his way. She was not in her husband's way now. And she was singularly refreshing to his jaded fancy. He had been so corrupt that, by revulsion rather than repentance, invincible virtue in a woman attracted him. Besides, it would be a good joke on Cutter to lose his wife—such a wife—while he was philandering in New York. He had always entertained a secret contempt for the fellow—a bounder who did not know how to bound; a gambler with the nerve of a financial adventurer. New York teemed with men of his type.

They had exchanged some commonplace remarks while he hit this line of reflection in the

high places, having gone over it many times before. That is to say, he offered the remarks—on the weather, on the growth of Shannon, and more particularly upon the current aspects of the war. Helen's contributions to these topics had been brief. He comprehended perfectly that she was still in suspense as to the meaning of his visit.

He rose presently, took his chair, advanced with a friendly air and sat down near her, potentially within reach. And was amused to see that she still regarded him as from a great distance. "But you have not answered my question," he said, going back to that. "When are you coming to New York to live? Thought you would have been settled there long before this time."

"I shall live here."

"Never in New York?"

"No."

"But you are not planning to neglect us entirely! Cutter would not stand for that. You will be coming up occasionally, of course," he insisted, smiling.

"No; this is my home."

Gad, couldn't she even squirm a bit? Why didn't she blaze forth at Cutter or cover the situation with a few lies? He wondered how it would feel to live with a woman who hit the

truth on the head every time, as if the truth was a nail to be driven in, even if it pierced your vitals.

Shippen swept a complimentary glance around the room as if in reply to her last remark. "Well, you have certainly made it a beautiful home," he said, feeling by the growing emergency of the question in her eyes that if he did not get off on another tack, she might force an explanation of his presence here which he was not ready to make until he had won more of her confidence. "This room is marvelous," he went on, "sedate and feminine. It escapes the austerity of being a noble room by a miracle. What is it? Piety with a flash of color, I should say. However did you think of such an effect? And how did you accomplish it?"

"I did not do it. I have learned something," she said, off her guard for the first time, following his eyes about this room as if she accompanied his thoughts.

"What have you learned?" he asked, smiling.

"To buy what I want—not mere things, but taste in the choice of these things. It is for sale, like any other commodity."

He laughed, with an appreciative glint of the eye.

"For so long I did not know that taste is the one thing most people have not got. They only look as if they had it, when in fact they have purchased it. You buy it from your tailor. The woman whose clothes please you pays the modiste who makes them much more for her taste than for her work. You can buy any kind of taste, good, bad or indifferent; but nearly everybody buys it."

What she said was not interesting; but he was interested that she could think it; it showed that she had a mind, which he had doubted. He hoped she would not develop too much along this line. The perfect woman, in his opinion, should have loveliness, health, and only a rudimentary intelligence. He was very tired, indeed, of the rhinestone sparkle of feminine wit.

"It is the same with the building and furnishing of a house," Helen showed up again. "They hire an architect and a decorator. And then they hire a landscape gardener. And when the whole scene inside and out is laid, they live in it as if they had planned it and achieved it. But they have bought every line, every shadow, and all the perspective—things that you feel and see, but cannot touch. It is not the house, but the idea it suggests for which you pay most. I had my own

ideas, but I employed professionals to produce them. This is what I have learned," she concluded, "not to cobble my own ideas. I simply told those men what I wanted."

"I should have liked to hear your instructions," he said.

"They were short. I told the architect that I wanted an honorable looking house, not a grand one."

He nodded, appreciatively, and waited. Some subtle change had taken place in her mind toward him during this last moment. There was a compelling power in her expression, as if now she wished to hold his attention. She had a purpose. He became uneasy and curious.

"And I told the man who was to choose the furniture and do the inside decorations that I wanted a home, a mild kind of place with some sadness in it, like the heart of a mother; and rifts of brightness in it, like the face of a mother when she smiles; and everything very fine to honor her, the mother, you understand, in the eyes of her children."

Shippen's agreeable attention changed for one instant to a blank stare; then he dropped his eyes as she went on with this intimate account of what she wanted her home to be. Mother! And she

had no children. The term had for him a sort of embarrassing animal significance. It was not discussed this way in polite circles, even by women who were mothers. You were supposed not to know it or to forget that this sparkling being with whom you were conversing, or maybe flirting, had passed through the experiences of an accouchement. His feelings suffered a revulsion toward her. But she held him as if she meant that he should carry away with him the dimensions, the waist measure, the countenance and the germinating biography of this house.

"I told him," she went on, still referring to the decorator, "that I wanted a home inside, where children would look as if they belonged in it, and not as if they had escaped from their own hidden quarters—soft places in it, you know, where a baby could just fall asleep, like the sofa over there," indicating with a nod a wide, low, old-fashioned soda shrouded in shadows.

He cast an embarrassed glance at it. His feelings were that a babe should be kept concealed until it was a child of an age to be decently exposed and confessed. Some men are like that, and a few women. Their parent instincts have decayed.

"And when they become grown sons and daugh-

ters," she continued, taking no notice of his discomfiture, "there should be wide, happy spaces in here for their joys—a house for lovers and weddings."

He waited. Apparently she had finished. He raised his eyes and saw her flushed, animated. "But why should you want such a house?" he asked, not that it made any difference now what she wanted. So far as he was concerned the spell of her charm was broken. His one desire was to escape this disenchantment and to find out what was in the wind for Cutter. He clung to that joke.

"Because all the time I was a wife I wanted this house, and I longed for children. Now I can have them."

Shippen stood up. She remained seated, eyes lifted with that rapt look fixed upon him.

"Did you say—children, Mrs. Cutter?" he stammered.

"Yes; now I shall have children," she repeated.

"Well, all right; but under the circumstances, it is a little unusual; don't you think so?" he said, the compass of his mind already pointed toward the door.

"Yes, it is," she agreed, and was evidently about to launch into this feature of the case when

she saw that he was about to take his departure. This reminded her of something. "But what was it you wished to see me about, Mr. Shippen?" she asked, with a return of that vague anxiety in the tones of her voice.

"Why, merely to resume a pleasant acquaintance, I suppose," he answered politely.

"Oh."

"Thank you for receiving me," he said. "Can I do anything for you in New York?"

"No," she answered quickly, but with no shade of embarrassment to indicate that she knew he referred to her husband.

He took his departure politely and formally, but he had all the sensations of flight. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed the moment he was out of the house. "To think I was on the point of letting myself in for her! What is a woman, anyhow? Some confounded provision Nature makes against her own defeat—a snare laid for us, nothing else. They have their own mind and purposes, contrary to our mind and purposes, whether they are good or bad. Something infernally tricky about the bad ones: something infernally permanent about the good ones. They all want to set, like hens," he snorted. "No wonder Cutter kicked out. Don't blame him. She's crazy, crazy

as a loon, if she is not worse, and of course she isn't that. Well, the joke is on me, not Cutter. And mum's the word when I get back to New York. Children! Gad, she must be planning an orphanage. Wonder if he knows what she's doing with his money. Wonder if this town is on to the racket."

He halted under the first street light and looked at his watch; barely time to meet Arnold at the hotel. They were to dine together and discuss the sale of the mining property which was to be handled through the Shannon National Bank. He quickened his step. He must get off on the eight o'clock express for New York. He had received a shock, a revulsion of his romantic emotions. Something distasteful had happened to him. He wanted to get away and recover from this nausea.

We all excite a certain amount of interest among our fellow men, not because we are interesting, perhaps, but because we live, and to that extent are in a degree mysterious. But when suddenly a man or woman becomes aware of a silent and persistent attention, it is disconcerting, because in secret, at least, he knows he has done enough to queer himself, if it should be known or even suspected. He has, however, the usual hu-

man confidence in the deferred publication of these deeds until the day of all revelations, when the Final Courts sit to judge all men. At this end of time it will not matter, because of the leveling effects of knowing all men even as they know him.

In my opinion this will be a day of gasping astonishments among the dusty saints and sinners hurriedly summoned so long after they shall have forgotten even their virtues, much less their sins, which in the flesh we manage to bury beyond painful recollection as soon as possible. But now and then we get a whiff of what will happen, when a great and good man in the community defaults and absconds with the church funds. Meanwhile the news that still travels fastest is the news of some one's business which is nobody else's business.

CHAPTER XVIII

The next day after Shippen's visit Helen went into Shannon to make some purchases and to make sure of the amount of her balance at the bank.

When she stepped from the car in front of Brim's general merchandise store, it was as if she had stepped into a foreign land. The street, all things about her, were so familiar that she only remembered afterwards the strangeness of familiar faces. Two men whom she knew passed her with their eyes down. A woman regarded her with furtive curiosity and returned her salutation with the briefest bow, as if she did not really know her. All this happened so quickly that she was not yet aware that something very personal to her was happening.

She was still off her guard when Mrs. Flitch sailed by her between the lace and stocking counter, merely giving her an eye-for-an-eye look, but with no further recognition, although Helen had wished her a "Good afternoon, Mrs. Flitch." She disposed of this hint by wondering what she had done to Mrs. Flitch, because this lady was noto-

riously sensitive. She had a turgid temper and reserved the right to show her poverty and independence on the slightest provocation by ceasing to speak to you.

Half an hour later when she came out to her car, a cold rain was beginning. She saw Mrs. Shaw approaching with no umbrella to protect her new spring hat. She waited, meaning to pick her up and take her wherever she should be going. But when she hailed her, this lady affected not to understand. She bowed coldly with the rain in her face and said, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Cutter," although she had always called her "Helen," and passed on.

It is depressing to find yourself suddenly outlawed by the people whom you have always known. Helen was never popular in Shannon. Unhappy people rarely ever are. They have so little to contribute to the common fund of human animation. But she had a certain standing in the good will of her neighbors.

It was not until she reached the bank that the explanation of what was going on really dawned upon her. She had known that it must come, this news of her abandonment by her husband, but she had not expected it to fall upon her like a curse.

Arnold, who occupied the chair at the presi-

dent's desk inside the doorway of the bank, having resumed this custom of the elder Cutter, had always risen to meet her when she came in. He would conduct her to the chair near his desk and attend personally to her affairs, if it was no more than the cashing of a check. This morning he was at his desk as usual. So was the extra chair, and nobody in it, but beyond a glance and a bow he took no notice of her. She went on to the cashier's window and presented a check. She was startled to see him glance at it, then step swiftly back to the bookkeeper and make eye sure of her balance before he cashed it.

She took the bills, thrust under the wicket and stared about her confused. She had lost prestige here. Why? She wondered. She had spent the money left from her mother's estate on the house, and a few thousands besides. But she was amply supplied with funds. She had never overdrawn her account.

Silly reflections! Childish defense against this financial coldness! If Arnold had known that she still had securities to the amount of considerably more than one hundred thousand dollars in her safety deposit box, his manner would have continued balmy. But he did not know this. He only knew that she was spending a great deal of

money. And he had dined with Shippen the previous evening.

Shippen had told him that she was separated from her husband. When he expressed surprise, Shippen expressed regret that he had "let the thing out"; he supposed the facts were already known in Shannon, he said.

Arnold assured him to the contrary. He said that he had had a "hunch," because he was subject to hunches as a financial man; but he had rather expected Cutter himself to fail. He had never entertained the slightest suspicion of Mrs. Cutter. How long had she been separated from her husband?

Shippen replied that he did not know; but he had thought probably some time before Cutter resigned from the presidency of the Shannon bank and took up his residence in New York.

Arnold said he thought it must have occurred quite recently, because Mrs. Cutter had been with her husband in New York for at least five months. In fact, she had only returned to Shannon late in January.

"I am associated with Cutter. I see him every day. I am constantly in his home, a bachelor apartment, and I positively know that his wife has never been in the place," Shippen replied.

"But I tell you she left here soon after Cutter did, and she did not return until about two months ago," Arnold insisted, round-eyed with amazement.

Shippen closed his lips grimly, implying that these were the lips of a gentlemen. A woman scorned may be dangerous, but a man defeated can be meanly revengeful. Shippen was reacting, after the manner of his kind, from the disgust he now felt toward this innocent woman.

No, he answered in reply to Arnold's next question, there had been no divorce yet, though he had reason to believe Cutter would be glad to get one.

"Cutter!" Arnold exclaimed.

Shippen nodded; then after a pause he added: "My impression is that Mrs. Cutter will not be the one to bring the suit, if it is ever brought."

"But he—man, do you know what you are saying about that woman?" Arnold exclaimed.

"I am saying nothing about her. I have seen something of her. I paid her a visit this afternoon, in fact; but—"

"You know her?"

"Since 1914," he nodded.

A silence followed this news. Men know one another. Arnold knew Shippen. He sat now staring at the tablecloth. It was his duty, but he

would be sorry to tell his wife. She liked Mrs. Cutter. Also, it was his duty to see that the bank was secure in its dealings with her. Until this moment he would have advanced her any reasonable sum. He would warn Lambkin in the morning to keep an eye on her balance. A woman like that had very few financial scruples, and no sense of the future. They usually lived by the day. Still, this fellow Shippen might be mistaken. Arnold had been a resident of Shannon only a few years, but he had inferred that Mrs. Cutter was devoted to her home and husband, an ordinary woman, good looking but not attractive. He would have sworn she was not attractive. She had never attracted him and in a discreet way he had a man's eye.

He accompanied Shippen to his train; then he went home and told Mrs. Arnold.

She was indignant. She said she did not believe a word of it. Later, Mrs. Shaw came in to borrow some yarn for a sweater she wished to finish that evening. She got the yarn, and this story about Mrs. Cutter.

She agreed with Mrs. Arnold that in her opinion there was not a word of truth in it. Still they speculated about how and where Helen had spent

those five months when she was not in Shannon nor with her husband in New York.

We may live above reproach, but few of us live above suspicion of one sort or another. It is the active character-sketching faculty we all have for drawing real or imaginary likenesses of each other's secret faces. Women are especially felicitous in this art, once they get the suggestion. They rarely originate the idea. The most damaging gossip we ever hear descends to us almost invariably from men. They whisper it to us; we tell it and get more credit for authorship than we deserve.

Thus Mr. Arnold had repeated to his wife what Shippen had told and intimated about the Cutters. It is not in the nature of any woman to retain such stuff. She must expel it. Therefore Mrs. Arnold told Mrs. Shaw.

And so the news flew, until the town was posted with it by the time Helen descended into it the next afternoon.

It is one thing to suffer a great humiliation in secret, and quite another thing to read it in the eyes of every familiar face. Helen understood that her secret was out at last. Nothing else could account for the manner of the various

people whom she met. She had known, of course, that it could not be kept; but she had hoped she might have had a little more time to protect herself with the one defense she had planned.

Her lips were trembling when she came out of the bank and entered the car. "Drive out the River road," she said.

Buck glanced back, startled by some emotional quality in her voice, which was usually a smooth and literal-speaking voice. He was much more surprised by the order she had given, for the rain was coming in rattling gusts on the March winds and the River road would be "slick as glass." Still, he took it, the big limousine reeling and sliding.

Helen sat as if she had been flung into the corner of the seat. She stared through the streaming window at the turgid river. She remembered every tree and slope of its banks, although years had passed since she had been on this road. Sometimes, when all is ready, when we have survived and are about to live, the power of hope fails and the vision fades. Helen passed into this coma of defeat. How was she to face these looks, this knowledge, this judgment in the eyes of the people of Shannon for years and years? Could anything ease this pain? What could she

love enough to make her indifferent to this perpetual publicity? After all, would it not be wiser to give up everything and go away?

The old foundry loomed desolately in the distance, drenched in rain, the bare boughs of the trees whipping against it. The great doorway seemed to yawn darkness. Nothing green now, no brightness! How long ago since in the shadow of this door she had said her prayers to love and listened to George's vows. She remembered everything—the yellow primroses at their feet, the blue wings of a bird suddenly spread in flight over their heads, the fresh, sweet smell of thyme and George's face bent above her in passionate tenderness.

The world had passed away since then! How could she bear this? It was loneliness. She had been dying of loneliness for months. She had never been out of pain, not for a moment; she knew this now. She wanted her husband—nothing else! Tears filled her eyes; she caught back a sob. For an instant her mind held one image, that of the man whom she had loved and married; one thought, the whole thought of him, a reeling picture of the years filled with only her devotion to him.

Then the wind and tide in her breast died away.

The color faded from her cheeks. All that had failed. She shivered, sat up, astounded that she could suffer like this for a man who had abandoned her.

We are not the only ones who fail, my masters. Sometimes the very will of God fails too. A world slips, waggles in its orbit, and goes rocketing, catching the light of a thousand suns as it falls and falls forever through space.

When they were directly below the foundry, Buck halted.

"Why do you stop here? Go on," she commanded sharply.

"Miss Helen, we can't," he protested. "They ain't no bottom to this road out yonder. Folks don't go no farther'n where we is now."

There was a moment's suspense while the motor purred and he waited, by no means enthusiastic about driving in this storm.

"Very well; we will turn back," she said in a queer voice. She was thinking about this road with no bottom in it beyond the place where so many lovers came to plight their troth.

Half an hour later, the disgruntled Buck had taken his mud-spattered car to the garage, and Helen was still standing on the veranda of her house, looking out over her small world.

The rain had passed like a silver veil over the hills. The clouds, split by this March wind, were rolling back like huge wagon covers. The grass was beginning to show a misty green on the lawn. Pink petals of peach blossoms, blown from the orchard behind the house, lay in rifts above it. The flowering shrubs, massed on either side of the driveway, were budding. The elm trees were shaking their beards of bloom. The last rays of the setting sun made all the windows of her house flame with golden light.

She could not leave this place; this was her house and her world. Every bloom to be was so sweetly foretold to her in this warm air. She could not give it up. There must be something to live for and love. She suffered most from the breaking of this habit of loving. And the shock she had of discovering that she still loved her husband disturbed her more than the possible attitude Shannon might assume toward her. She was that far from suspecting, you understand, the imaginary activities of gossips who are never contented with the bare facts, but must invent explanations of these facts according to their fancies.

Well, she decided, she would not go away. She would hold to her original plan for happi-

ness. Surely there must be peace and joy in love you nurtured yourself.

Then she turned and paced slowly the length of the veranda. Her step changed to increasing swiftness as she came back from the far end, her face also. She looked as she might have looked if flames enveloped her, and she was flying through the wind, a wildness and horror in her eyes.

She dashed into the house, caught sight of the maid in coming up the hall, who halted abruptly at this sudden vision of her mistress.

"Charlotte, get my things ready. Pack my trunk. I am leaving on the early morning train," Helen exclaimed as she brushed past her and disappeared into her room.

CHAPTER XIX

There is a place called an Inn above a city in the mountains—it was built only a few years ago by a man with a Brobdingnagian imagination—a huge pile of bowlders, tunneled and dragged down from the mountain sides and put together as if the ages had soldered them into a great castle. The walls within are rough and covered with strange scripts, fragments of great lines from great poets, sentences from philosophers and saints. It is not a place for tourists, but for people weary with the strife of living, made obedient to peace and silence by exhaustion.

I have seen this place. It is marvelous, and strangely effective morally. Bad people get a somnambulant look there, because they are sleep-walking in their virtues. They get a look of naïve innocence; or, if the system of moral compensation in them is broken, they take a horrified look around and escape on the next train.

One morning, so early that the day was still a gray cavern between earth and sky with the wild March winds whirling in it, a slender woman descended from a taxicab at the gateway to the drive

which led down the mountain slope to this Inn. She wore a blue coat with a fur collar drawn close about her fair face, a small fur hat with an exceeding vivid rose tucked into the band of thicker fur around the crown and fitted so snugly that a mere line of her bright hair showed beneath. She had eyes the color of blue flowers, paler than violets, the kind that always look up at you meaningly from the cold ground in March—but you do not know what they mean—exactly as this woman's eyes looked upward and abroad now beneath the narrow sweeping line of her swallow-winged brows.

She was not young; she was touched with the same sadness of those pale blue flowers above the winter earth. But she appeared young in this half light of the early dawn. Any man at the sight of her, swinging gracefully down the winding road between the naked trees, beneath the pearling skies of daybreak, might have conceived the idea of courting her. But he would have dismissed it instantly after a nearer reading look. He would have perceived that she was already "taken," that she belonged either to a man or to his children. She was not in the possessive case.

She loitered along the way, as one familiar with

this place, looking for remembered things, ferns between the rocks, puffs of green moss above these rocks, flashes of wild azalea deeply bowered among the laurel bushes, tall stalks of shooting star blossoms white against the gray bluff, and a path leading from the roadway up the side of the bluff. I suppose there is not even one little high place on this earth which has not somewhere upon it a path that goes to the top. And frequently the idlest people in the world make them. It is due to the futile persistence of the altar instinct in them.

She had come down into the paved plaza in front of the Inn before the porter carrying her bags overtook her. She followed him through the door and paused at the breath-taking majesty of this huge room. Filled with guests, its dignity was diminished; but bare and solemn and silent in this early morning hour, it was tremendous. She cast a glance upward at the rough walls, scrolled over with those mighty texts taken from the Scriptures that men have made for themselves, but not one from Moses or the Prophets —the idea being, I suppose, not to open the bleeding wounds of conscience in many guests by reminders too authoritatively worded about their sins and trespasses.

She caught sight of one at last from Marcus Aurelius as if she had been looking for it. The wisdom of it did not apply to her case, but it soothed her for that reason, because she remembered it as an exit she used to take from her unhappy thoughts during those first months of her unnatural widowhood. When you are bedridden within by a secret grief, these old negative philosophers are very good drug doctors for your complaints. This is why so many miserable women take to the narcotics of theosophy and other forms of recumbent mysticisms. They are mental opiates.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cutter! Glad to see you back here," the night clerk said, smiling sleepy-eyed at her as she approached the desk. He swung the register around and offered her a pen.

"You received my wire?" she asked, when she had written her name.

"Yes, and fortunately we were able to reserve the same room for you," he answered, evidently referring to a request which she had wired.

"Shall you want a car, as usual, Mrs. Cutter?" he called after her as she was about to enter the elevator.

"Not until this afternoon. How are the roads?"

"Very good, at least your favorite one is," he assured her.

She had come to this Inn immediately after Cutter left her the previous year. She had recovered her health of mind and strength of body in this quiet place; she had profited by the patterns of peace and imagination it afforded; and she had spent much time visiting fine old houses, studying the manners, ways and clothes of the people who came and went. She acquired for the first time in her life some feeling and sense of elegance, lines and colors. And it was here that she met the architect who drew the plans for remodeling her house at Shannon.

She resumed her old diversions now. She mingled little with the other guests, but spent her time driving about the country. She was still oppressed by the rude awakening she had, that last day in Shannon, to the fact that she loved and longed for her husband. She was disturbed and humiliated by this revelation, as one is by the awakening of some weakness we believe we have outgrown.

The issue constantly in her mind was whether, after all, it would not be wiser to give up her house in Shannon and live this idle, pleasant existence. There were no associations here to remind

her of the past. And in spite of her huge expense in the effort to destroy these memories, it was after she came back to Shannon that the old pain and unhappiness had returned to overwhelm her. Then this issue was settled for her with a horrible, irrevocable decision, and she was flung violently back upon the one refuge, her house in Shannon, and the one plan she had for substituting love with affection, which she had been on the point of abandoning.

One evening she came down late for dinner, passed through the swinging doors and sat down at the table reserved for her, which was near these doors. The room was filled with week-end guests. She had an excellent view of this brilliant company. There were handsomely gowned women, rouged and sparkling with jewels; there were more men than were usually to be seen at leisure during this man-grasping war period; and quite a sprinkling of military officers, evidently on leave from Washington.

Helen had given her order and sat idly scanning the scene before her, listening to snatches of conversation from the nearer tables.

She was barely enough like these other women in her ivory-white, embroidered Canton crêpe not to attract attention. She was pale, as

they were painted. Her hair lay in a soft golden coil on her head, where their hair ruffled in a thousand glistening convolutions. Her lips were parted, showing the lapped edge of the two white teeth. The dark lashes of her eyes were more apparent, because of the blueness of these eyes and of the whiteness of her skin.

Once she caught the steady, dark gaze of a woman seated directly opposite her, but at a distant table. She lifted her own glance and hurried by this overhead route back to the bunch of violets in the vase on her own table. She could not have told why she did this, probably for the same reason one flinches and draws back from the sudden flash of a brilliant flame. She sat staring at the violets, wondering about this woman, not intelligently, with a sort of amazement which was not pleasant. Never before had she seen such a fury of commanding beauty. She thought she must be tall. She was very dark—olive skin, flushed like a velvet rose; black hair, daringly coiffured and heightened by a Spanish comb; a straight, imperious nose; a fine-lipped mouth, red and cruelly turned to mirth. But the fury of her beauty lay in the smoking black eyes. And the maroon velvet gown she wore seemed somehow to enhance the heat of terrible, searing

beauty, as if the body of this woman had been forged, slim and strong, in a furnace and still glowed dangerously and dully.

Helen wondered why she had not seen her when she entered the dining room, for now she could almost hear her crackle. Yet she did not look up again in that direction. There was a man at the table with this woman, she knew; but she had been so startled by the native malice of those dark eyes that she had only a blurred impression of his back.

Suddenly there was a sound in this place where the confused murmur of many voices made a thousand sounds. It was the rich, rollicking laugh of a man, one high note quickly suppressed.

Helen stiffened, her hand flew to her breast as if she had received a mortal wound. This trumpeting note of mirth was as much a part of her experience as her husband's kisses had been. Her lips tightened, her eyes wide with horror flew this way and that, scanning every face. Then they fell again upon the dark woman whom she had forgotten in this sudden anguish. Instantly she felt the red lash of this woman's smile, as if she had reached across the space between them to strike a blow. There was contempt and

recognition in the smoldering black eyes—no defiance, but triumph.

The man facing her at this table with his back to Helen caught it, flirted his head around to find the object of it—and looked straight into the eyes of his wife!

For one instant they held this silent interview with each other in that crowded room. Then the woman struck her hands together with a sharp, little smack, and let out a gale of laughter, too keen, too high in this decent place. Every head was turned toward her, every eye fell upon her in polite amazement. Still she laughed. And still George Cutter's eyes followed his wife. For Helen had risen at the first note of that stinging laugh and had made her way blindly from the room.

"What happened?" asked a fat man, rolling a pop-eyed look across the table at his wife.

"I didn't see anything," she replied, taking her soup with the absorption of an innocent person.

"Who was the pale lady? Didn't you see her going out?"

"A lot of people are coming in and going out," his wife returned, skinning the bottom of her soup plate with her spoon.

"And there's the one that did the laugh," he said, nodding at the woman.

"She looks like a jade; probably is one," his wife announced, with one appraising look.

"Fellow with her is all in then—head down, knees sprung, tail drooping. He's come a cropper and knows it. Look at him, Lily."

The old Lily looked at the man before the "jade" indifferently, then passed the look on to the service door from whence cometh, or should come, the next course of this very good dinner. "Henry, you are a born scandalmonger," she said reproachfully.

"No, it's an acquired taste, but I have it; and if ever I saw a fine scene in a matrimonial melodrama, I've just witnessed one. Pale lady's the wife, t'other one's the gallant gal bandit, and the man's the victim," he snickered.

Before these guests had finished dining, Helen Cutter had left the Inn.

A week later Charlotte received a wire from her mistress, instructing her to send Buck with the car to Atlanta in time to meet a certain train at the Terminal Station on a certain day. This message was sent from Baltimore, which had not been Mrs. Cutter's destination when she left home, Charlotte observed with a sniff. She did

not like Mrs. Cutter's ways, referring to this tendency she had of flying about the world alone when she had a perfectly good maid, who had expected to accompany her. And she did not like the company she kept, referring to Shippen who was the only visitor she had received. And what was more to the point, she had no idea of being buried alive in this little speck of a town. Therefore she meant to go back to Atlanta in the car, and stay there—strong emphasis on the last two words.

It was known in Shannon that "Helen Cutter had gone again." But as late as the third week in April, no one knew that she had returned. There was a rumor current that probably she would not come back, since she must have realized that everybody knew what had happened.

Then Mrs. Flitch, who was out selling Liberty Bonds one afternoon, passed the Cutter place and beheld a baby carriage on the lawn! Not only that, but the carriage was obviously occupied, because Maria, togged out in a nurse's cap and apron, was rolling it back and forth along the driveway. Mrs. Flitch said later that you could have "knocked her down with a feather," but she decided no matter what kind of woman Helen Cutter was, it was no more than right that she

should be called upon to buy these bonds. Therefore she turned in and walked briskly up the drive, meeting Maria directly front of the house.

"Is Mrs. Cutter at home?" she asked, ignoring the old woman's occupation.

"No'm, she ain't here; she's gone to git a goat," Maria answered.

"A goat!"

"Yes'm, a milk goat for the baby," rolling her eyes.

Mrs. Flitch stood perfectly still, the incarnation of malignant virtue, allowing her eyes to pass back and forth between Maria and the carriage. The wicker hood concealed the contents from her avid gaze. When she could endure her curiosity no longer, she moved slowly around to the front, but maintaining a decent distance, and stared.

The baby recognized her at once, grinned, showing several teeth, and waved a highly ornamental teething ring.

"Maria, whose child is this?" Mrs. Flitch demanded sternly, as if it was her duty to know.

"Miss Helen says it's her'n," was the noncommittal reply.

Followed a series of questions as to the age and possible complexion of this child. One confidence led to another question until Maria let go

and told all that she knew, which only increased the cloud hanging over the origin of this baby.

She said that she had gone in to clear the table that night in August of last year when Mr. Cutter left his wife. She had heard him tell her that he was going to leave her.

"What did Mrs. Cutter say to that?"

"Not a word. From first to last I did not hear her open her mouth, Mrs. Flitch. But he talked a right smart. I disremember what he said, but it wa'n't praisin'. Then he goes out and banged the door after him. He ain't been here since."

"And she does not hear from him?"

"Not as I knows of. Miss Helen left 'reckly after he did, and she was gone five months. But she wa'n't wid him. We used to git letters from her from a place in Ca'lina."

"Which, North or South Carolina?"

"I don't know, 'm. Buck read the letters."

"This is a strange baby," Mrs. Flitch announced grimly.

Maria wiped her eyes. She was working herself up to an emotional pitch by some act of memory. Mrs. Flitch waited for the revelation she knew must be coming.

"I'm goin' to tell you all I know about how come dis baby. Not as it kin explain somethings,

like her having black hair and being dark complected, but it's all I know," she began.

"Go on."

"After Mr. Cutter was gone, Miss Helen laid in bed three days. She jest laid there, white as a corpse, with her eyes open. She didn't shed no tears and she didn't say anything, mor'n for me to hand her a glass of water or somethin' like that. Then one mornin' she hops out of bed, dresses herself an' goes downtown to the bank. While she was dressin' I comes to the door to fetch her slippers, which I'd been polishin' in the kitchen." Maria left off and rolled her eyes lugubriously, as if such a tongue as she had could not reveal the rest.

"Go on; what happened?"

"Mrs. Flitch," lowering her voice to a tragic whisper, "she was talkin' to herself! 'Now,' she says, 'I kin have children.' She said them words over and over, 's if she was glad of the chance."

"But what did she mean?"

"I d'no, 'm. I been in this world a long time, an' I ain't never heerd no 'oman, white or black, say sech things and her husband jest that minute 'sertin' her. But she's done it—what she said she'd do. Here's the child," she concluded, stand-

ing like a black exclamation point beside the baby carriage.

Mrs. Flitch counted her fingers surreptitiously and regarded the infant once more with a sort of expert scientific stare.

"Where is the maid? I understood Mrs. Cutter had a maid?" she asked suddenly, as if she was on the point of subpœnaing a more competent witness.

"She's gone. Said she didn't like the looks of it."

"Of what?"

"I d'no, 'm."

"Maria," Mrs. Flitch said after a staccato silence, "you need not tell Mrs. Cutter that I called."

"La! Mrs. Flitch, hit don't make no difference. This baby ain't no secret, whatever else it is. Miss Helen don't keer who knows she's got it," Maria called after her.

All these months this servant had known what Helen believed no one knew in Shannon, the minutest details of that last scene with her husband.

There are no secrets. We may give alms so privately that the twin right hand of our left hand remains blissfully ignorant of what we spent

on these alms. Nothing is easier than to conceal a good deed, if you really wish to do so, because it is not our nature to suspect each other of secret goodness. It is hard enough to obtain credit when we stand on the street corner and proclaim our charity in a loud voice, or get the whole beautiful thing exploited in the public press. This is what we usually do, being in some mortal doubt whether, after all, the reward promised by our Heavenly Father will be conferred openly enough or soon enough to pay for the unnatural expense of secrecy. This is a mistake, of course, because, while we are duly credited, the smiling, cynical interpretation placed upon our motive takes the shine off the deed and the alms.

But let one of the best of us become involved in a doubtful deed, however innocently, and it is known. Witnesses spring from the very ground to swear to your guilt, even if you have gone into your closet to taste a pleasant fault. Even if, as in Helen's case, the evidence is flimsy and circumstantial, there is always an eye that sees, an ear that hears, a tongue to tell what happened or what apparently happened. The deeper truth—the innocence of the wicked, the guilt of the saints—remains hidden save from the omniscience of the Almighty. This is why it seems to me highly

probable that there really may be a super-record kept in a Book of Life far removed from the laws and judgments of this present world. We shall be graded accordingly, exalted or demoted, not so furiously condemned as our own heinous imaginations demand.

CHAPTER XX

The flamboyant display Helen made of her baby shocked Shannon and finally conquered the willful suspicions entertained by her neighbors. Her diffidence and reserve vanished. She was exalted. She glowed. She had passed into another state of being. This child had related her to everybody.

She would have Buck stop the car before the Shaw residence and summoned Mrs. Shaw forth to look at it and advise her about whether to keep stockings on it or not. Mrs. Shaw said she never did.

On the other hand, Mrs. Arnold said that would depend upon whether the baby was cutting her eye teeth. In that case she advised not only stockings, but a flannel band about the body. Did Mrs. Cutter know whether the little thing was approaching its second summer and stomach and eye teeth or not? This question was put very casually, but with a shrewd glance.

Helen said she would "see." Whereupon she thrust an exploring finger into the squirming infant's mouth, felt about in there, withdrew it, and announced that she could detect no heralding

signs of these malignant teeth, but they might be coming. This was an unusually precocious baby! Therefore she would get the bands and keep the stockings on.

Then she passed on, apparently with no compunctions about having defrauded Mrs. Arnold of legitimate information about the baby.

But that lady hurried across the street to tell Mrs. Flitch something. "It is not her own child, my dear; I am sure of that," she said, after reporting what Helen had done.

"Well, it could be," Mrs. Flitch insisted.

"But it isn't. I don't think she knows exactly how old the child is. And a real mother, you know, can feel when her baby is teething."

Mrs. Flitch nodded emphatically, held her note of silence a moment, then added: "If it isn't her own, there is no telling what kind of baby it is, nor how it will turn out."

"Well, it is turning out happily for that poor girl anyway. She looks years younger, and happy," Mrs. Arnold replied.

"If Mr. Flitch deserted me, I couldn't be happy. I'd never hold up my head again."

"She has courage."

"And she seems to have money," Mrs. Flitch put in.

"Yes, Mr. Arnold thinks she has ample means."

"Then it must be alimony."

"We have heard nothing of a divorce."

"I think, when people are married, they should live together until death parts them. And if they won't, they should make a clean breast of it, and let folks know exactly where they stand, inside the law or out of it," Mrs. Flitch announced virtuously.

"Nothing like that is ever hidden. In time I suppose something clarifying will happen."

"Well, I hope it won't be disgraceful."

"It is not easy for scandal to touch a woman who devotes her life to bringing up children. Did you ever think of that?" Mrs. Arnold shot back. "I think we should stand by Mrs. Cutter and help her all we can with this baby," she added.

"Oh, I'm willing to do my duty. But she never gives me the chance to do anything. I'm the mother of five healthy children, yet she will pass by my door and ask somebody about that baby's diet who never had a child," Mrs. Flitch complained.

Thus the wind of private opinion, which is more dangerous than public opinion, veered and changed toward Helen Cutter. Her skies cleared,

without her ever having suspected the fury with which they were charged against her. Of all the good women I have ever known, she was the least concerned for her reputation. And this is one of the weaknesses of that class, a craven, almost guilty fear of evil tongues, which more vulnerable women do not share.

There were broken hours, I suppose, when some fleeting vision of the past absorbed her peace and joy. We never do escape those whispering tongues of memory that make speech with us from the years behind us. Sometimes in the late summer afternoon Helen, walking in her garden, would halt, transfixed as if a blow had fallen upon her. For the briefest moment she would see her young husband swinging along the path that led through the old shrubbery to this garden, his eyes fixed brightly upon her, the dear object of his love and hopes. And her heart leaped as in those first happy years. Then she would close her eyes, not always in time to hold back the tears. But if one is proud enough, there are tears which leave no trace upon a woman's face.

More frequently however, it was that last sight she had of him in the dining room of the Inn, held so firmly in the grasp of another woman that he dared not to rise when she, his wife, passed

so near her skirts almost brushed him. She would never forget the livid shame and horror when he looked back and caught her eye nor the woman's crackling laugh. Sometimes this scene flared before her, and she saw herself, with her hand still pressed to her breast, making her blind, staggering escape. It was a kind of insurance she carried against the awakening of the old tenderness for her husband.

A year had gone by, another spring was at hand; and little Helen was learning to toddle on her sturdy legs, a pink rose of a baby with short, dark curls.

"She is so good. Are all little children good?" Helen asked, smiling at Mrs. Arnold, who was paying one of her frequent visits.

"At this age, yes," the elder woman replied dryly.

"And I have so little time to devote to her, now that the other baby has come," Helen sighed.

"The other baby!" Mrs. Arnold gasped.

"Why, don't you know? Haven't you heard? I have just got a lovely boy," Helen informed her.

"Here? You have him now?"

Helen nodded. "Come and see him. He is too young to bring out yet," she explained.

She led the way to the small crib in the nursery, where a very young infant lay asleep.

"It is a fine child," Mrs. Arnold announced gravely. "How many do you expect to—have?" she asked.

"I don't know yet. It will depend on how I get on with these; but at least three. This is little Samuel, named for father. The next one will be a girl, named Mary Elizabeth, for mother. I had to call the first one Helen. And I am afraid I shall always love her best. She was my first happiness, you see, after—after," she repeated, "unhappiness. I doubt if the others will mean so much to me. Do they?" she asked anxiously. "I mean do mothers grow to love all their children alike?"

"I don't know, my dear; but you will," Mrs. Arnold answered, her eyes filling with tears.

"They are treasures I am laying up for my old age. They will be my life and joy and hope, when I shall have grown too old to achieve these things. Their laughter will lift me. Their love will be my perpetual spring. And we shall have weddings in this house," she concluded.

"You believe in marriage?" the other could not refrain from asking.

"Oh, yes. Even in my own."

"You would go back to your husband?"

"Never."

There was a silence.

"But if he comes back to you?"

"He will not come," she returned.

When I came to know her later, she must have been confirmed in this opinion. For I had lived a year in Shannon before I learned that George Cutter was not a dead and buried man. He had passed with that flotsam and jetsam tide created by the Great War. And the House of Helen had become the center of social life in Shannon. She was a sedate hostess, always garnished with her children. She had declared this kind of natural peace, and kept it in a world rocking with the confusion which followed the war.

She belonged to the deep furrow of life, where the soil is rich and strong. If she had been an herb of the fields, she would have been an evergreen herb. If she had been a tree, her boughs would never have shed their leaves. If she had been a rose, she would have bloomed fairest above a hoarfrost. The lives of many of us, who were drawn to her during this time by one sort of distress or another, took root in her quiet heart, and it was her wish that not one of these should suffer or perish.

The ignobly wise believe that this opulence of kindness is no more than the manifestation of the nature of women, not a virtue, but the maternal instinct common to all mammals.

If you ask me, I should point to the prevailing type of modern woman as an example of what mere Nature does for a woman. She is a brilliant creature, ready to show the iridescent wings of her charms to all men, not one man; a childless wife, ready to sue for her liberty and alimony on the slightest provocation; an ambitious person, futilely active, who farms out her home to servants that she may become the dupe and handmaiden of politicians. She belongs to the fashionable scrubwoman class, who take the job of cleaning up the town and setting the table for the next convention. She is subsidized by compliments and favors. There is nothing permanent in her; and she will not increase nor multiply after the manner of her kind. She is the lightest, most transient phase of her sex we have yet seen. But she is astonishingly natural.

Few tales end with the death of the principal characters. They usually end just as the heroes and heroines begin to live happy ever after. And you are obliged to take the author's word for that,

because the statement is contrary to all human experience.

Still you must expect the approaching end of this chronicle, because the House of Helen has been established. There remains one last scene.

CHAPTER XXI

Beginning with the year 1921 many men, who had too swiftly acquired fortunes in the handling of government contracts, began to pass under the rod of investigations concerning such wartime profits. George Cutter was one of these. Somebody, with a talent for figuring up the cost and sales price of lumber left over from a half-finished training camp for soldiers, discovered that the said George William Cutter had failed to turn in one million eight hundred and some odd thousands of dollars due the government. This statement appeared in a New York paper. Nothing followed. And nothing was heard of Mr. Cutter for another year.

Then one afternoon in May, of 1922, a corpulent, extremely bald-headed man, with a seamy face and pouched eyes, stood up in the day coach of a train which was pulling into Shannon. He reached for his hat in the rack overhead, put it on jauntily, pulled down his vest, which had wrinkled up so often when he sat down and had been pressed so rarely that it remained faintly fluted diagonally across his broad expanse. He

squared his shoulders, you may say with a former air, and stepped briskly down the aisle and waited meekly on the platform between the coaches while several people descended at the station. Then he came down, and moved off hurriedly.

No one recognized him. Misfortune does something to you. It changes your manner, and takes the swagger out of your step, especially if you are the author of your misfortune.

This man walked heavily out Wiggs Street, looking about him furtively until he came to the Cutter residence. Then he lifted his eyes and beheld it in utter amazement—a fine, wide-winged, colonial mansion where a cottage had stood when he left Shannon five years before.

"I have missed her. She is gone," he mumbled.

At this moment he caught sight of a small girl, who had already got sight of him and was regarding him curiously from the shade of a lilac bush.

There was a time when he would have strode finely up to the door, rung the bell and inquired for Mrs. Cutter; but now he was not equal to that display. He had lost his presence. He would get the information he needed from this child after the manner of the class to which he now belonged, the surreptitious class.

"How do you do, my dear," he said from the pavement to the small lady under the lilac bush.

She stuck a finger in her mouth and continued to regard him.

"Who lives here?"

"My muvver," she answered, not pridefully, but with assurance.

"And what is your name?"

"Helen."

He sat down on the terraced wall and stared so long at the ground that she feared he had forgotten her, and she was not of the age or sex to endure the idea of being forgotten.

"My muvver's name is Helen, too," she informed him. "And my brover's name is Sammy. What's yours?"

"Mine's George. Ever heard it?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"What is your father's name?"

"We don't keep him wiv us," she explained.

"Oh, you don't? Where is he?"

She did not know where this parent was, but she could show him Sammy. And off she ran, dark curls flying.

The man watched her. Then he fell again to staring at the ground. Fervent ejaculations oc-

curred to him, but he uttered not a word. The histrionic had died in him.

He saw a car coming rapidly along the street. When it passed, he would get up and move on. This house, these children made him a stranger and an outcast here as he was everywhere. Why had he returned? Why had he not accepted the sentence of shame and defeat, slid on down where men rest from honor and hope, that last refuge of complete degradation?

But the car turned into the driveway, covering him with dust as it whirled past, and through the dust he beheld the face of his wife. He came to his feet and followed with a hurried, shuffling step. He was still some distance away when the driver halted before the house, then drove on out of sight.

At this moment Helen, who had been about to mount the steps, caught sight of him.

He came on, wondering if she recognized him. It was incredible that she should know him. When you have been defeated, degraded, caught the shadows of prison bars that never lift from before your vision, you do not expect recognition; you only fear it. He feared now, with a sort of truculent impotence, what might be going to happen. Still he came on with that courage of

mean despair which men still show when they have fallen to the last degree of shameless shame.

Their eyes met—hers calm and steady as the horizon of a perfect day, his wavering between doubt and determination.

"Helen!"

Her lips moved as if speechless words died there.

Thus they stood, he at bay, she with the light falling upon her, grave and sweet, not condemning him, seeing in him the answer that love and fate make to such women.

"Helen," he cried again, "are you my wife?"

She lifted her hand in that old gesture to her breast, the same pale look of ineffable goodness which he remembered. Then, still looking back, she turned, mounted the steps and entered the door of her house and stood before him as if she waited. She showed against the shadows like the figure of a shrine upon a dark hillside above a dusty road over which pilgrims come and go. They are never moved, these shrines, from age to age. They are altars that do not fall. So are some women. They are the sanctuaries of mankind. It is the fashion to despise them, but they hold the world together.

Cutter came slowly up the step, with a flash

of life and hope in his face—an ignoble and worthless man made safe in the shelter of a woman's heart, whose wish was that none should perish who looked to her for comfort. It was not love, but honor that opened the door of her house to him.

THE END

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
00022135417